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A CASE STUDY OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS AS A PRESSURE GROUP: THE OXFORDSHIRE DISPUTE

ROBERT CHARLES STAPLEY B.A.

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Centre for Language and Communication

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A CASE STUDY OF THE NUT AS A PRESSURE GROUP: THE OXFORDSHIRE DISPUTE

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a case study of an attempt by a specific pressure group, the National Union of Teachers, to influence the policy-making process of a local education authority, Oxfordshire County Council, at a time when the local authority had embarked upon a course of expenditure reductions in its education budget.

The study seeks to identify, and assess the significance of, national developments during the mid-1970s which had a bearing on the course of this particular dispute. Three significant factors are identified: the impact upon local education authorities of the reform of local government in England and Wales in the early 1970s; the changing relationship between teacher unions, the Department of Education and Science and local authorities during the 1960s and '70s; and the impact of the nation's economic difficulties upon the funding of the education service. It is argued that the Oxfordshire dispute of 1976-77 illustrates a turning point in relations between local education authorities and teacher unions as they were each required to adjust to the new realities which confronted them.

The major theoretical approaches to the policy-making process are identified as systems theory, pluralism, Marxism and neo-liberalism and the particular contribution of each of these to the study of policy-

making is discussed. The events of the dispute are analysed using the models provided by these theories each of which provides a different explanation of the underlying factors which determined the policy-making framework within which the dispute occurred. The study points to pluralism as the theory which most closely accords with the practical realities of policy-making as viewed by those involved in the process.

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INTRODUCTION

This study focuses upon an example of policy-making within a local education authority and specifically the impact upon that process of the actions of one pressure group, the National Union of Teachers. The policies being pursued by the local education authority concerned, Oxfordshire, involved substantial reductions in the education budget and in particular a significant reduction in staffing levels and the pupil/teacher ratio; it therefore represents an example of policy-making in the context of a conflict between the education authority and its workforce. In looking at the circumstances surrounding this particular conflict of interest between the teacher unions and their employer the study attempts to place the dispute in the context of a period of significant transition in relationships within the world of education policy-making. It points to the mid-1970s as a time when, due to a number of factors, these relationships came increasingly to be characterised by conflict rather than by consensus. The Oxfordshire dispute serves to illustrate the tensions generated during such a transitional period as well as providing an indicator of future developments, many of which took another decade to come to fruition.

The study includes a description of the course of the dispute and examines the impact upon the policy-making process in Oxfordshire of national developments at the time, specifically the impact upon local education authorities of the reorganisation of the system of local government in England and Wales in the early 1970s, and the impact upon the education service of the nation's economic performance by the mid-

1970s. The study also examines the principal theories of the policy-making process and examines their applicability to the events of the Oxfordshire dispute.

The narrative traces the course of the dispute from the decision of the County Council in mid-1976 to reduce significantly its education expenditure during the financial years 1976-77 and 1977-78. These proposals, which were in response to a Government request for expenditure restraint by local government, were to place Oxfordshire at the focal point of the conflict between teachers and their employers over spending cuts. The study draws attention to the influence in the ruling group on the County Council of politicians whose approach towards local government expenditure and education policy increasingly reflected the emergence of neo-liberal ideas.

The local authority's plans, which included a reduction in the teaching force of some 10%, engendered significant opposition which the National Union of Teachers in particular sought to build into a campaign which would lead to the reversal of this policy decision. This campaign sought to build parental pressure upon the Authority through their involvement in meetings, demonstrations and petitions and through building parental support for the industrial action taken by the teachers. Nevertheless, the results of the County Council elections in May 1977, at a significant stage in the dispute, gave no indication that the campaign had succeeded in making the issue so fundamental to the Oxfordshire electorate that it would influence their electoral behaviour; in fact the ruling group greatly strengthened its position on the Council. This

apparent lack of parental support for the teachers' cause was indicative of a wider disenchantment with the methodology and results of the state education service despite thirty years of substantial investment in educational provision. This loss of parental support for a campaign to maintain the level of education spending represents a significant break with the post-war pro-education consensus; it was to have a significant effect upon the future direction of education policy.

The study attempts to explore the motivation of the parties to the dispute; the teachers' view was that the Authority's policy could be reversed through the application of sufficient pressure and their desire to ensure that Oxfordshire was not permitted to set a trend for other local education authorities in terms of their response to Government exhortations to restrain spending. For the Council the issue appeared to become one of principle at an early stage; were the teachers to be permitted to challenge the Authority's control over its financial priorities? These differing perceptions of the issue were reflected in the attitude towards the involvement of the Secretary of State for Education and Science. The teachers looked to the Secretary of State to intervene in the dispute, presumably with a view to re-establishing a consensus as to the needs of the education service - they were to be sadly disillusioned by the role adopted by the Department of Education and Science. The Authority, on the other hand, appeared happy to keep the Department at arm's length when not reminding them that the proposed expenditure cuts were simply a practical example of the Government's declared objective of reducing local government expenditure.

The course of the dispute is charted from the original decision to make substantial cuts in the education service, through the early stages of 'mass' opposition in the form of a half-day strike of all the Council's employees and a mass rally, the various negotiating sessions and the extended strike action by the National Union of Teachers. It explores the public postures of the two parties to the dispute as well as the evolution of their negotiating stances as they sought a solution to what came to assume the features of an intractable problem. The settlement which ultimately emerged is explored and the positions of the respective sides at the end of the dispute evaluated.

The second chapter traces the development of teachers' pressure group activity since the second World War, with particular reference to the National Union of Teachers, and sets this alongside the changing economic climate in particular as it impacted upon the education service. The widely perceived consensus based approach to education policy-making, in the 1950s in particular, is examined and is epitomised by the relationship between Ronald Gould, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, and William Alexander, Chairman of the Association of Education Committees.

The 'partnership' between the Ministry of Education, the teachers and the education committees developed during a period when education was afforded a high priority in the allocation of resources within a framework of an expansion of public provision and an increase in public expenditure. This was a time when the teacher unions (and the National Union of Teachers was no exception) were anxious to preserve an image as

'professional associations' who, if they did not eschew the tactics adopted by 'blue-collar' trade unions, were anxious to keep a discreet distance between themselves and the trade union movement. Sporadic outbursts of industrial action notwithstanding, the era was typified by policy formulation through informal discussions between the 'partners' leading to compromise and the avoidance of conflict. This helped to ensure the expansion of educational provision with a widely held belief that this would contribute significantly towards economic progress and social harmony.

The study points to the early 1970s, with economic constraints and a clear involvement in the world of education of politicians whose primary responsibility lay elsewhere as a significant turning point in the policy-making process. Teachers found themselves facing a reduction in the level of expenditure upon the education service as a result of economic policies designed to restore the health of the nation's economy. At the same time they were to find themselves caught up (and very much on the defensive) in the so-called 'Great Debate' on education initiated by the Prime Minister. Under attack, seemingly on all fronts, teachers looked to new strategies for securing their objectives - their traditional approach gave them all too little access to those whose decisions were so influential in the changed circumstances.

The process of adjusting to the lessons which the teachers were required to learn in these changing conditions can actually be traced as far back as the 1950s. Two examples (the campaign for a shared-cost dependants' pension scheme, and the campaign against the Government's 1961 pay

freeze) are considered of the inadequacy of the traditional forms of pressure to deal with situations in which policies have a direct bearing upon power relationships external to the education service. Teachers were therefore not encountering these problems for the first time in the 1970s but they were by that point in time being forced to address the question of external power relationships in increasingly vital and fundamental aspects of the education service. From the occasional issue which was not open to resolution within the parameters of the education service teachers began increasingly to come into conflict with Government policy thus requiring a more significant public role in an attempt to influence policy-making. The 'Campaign for Education' mounted by the National Union of Teachers in 1962 marks a significant point in the development of a more public outlook. Whether the campaign met with much success in its objective of promoting the interests of the education service is perhaps open to doubt; however it was an indication of the limitations of the consensus approach towards policy-making.

As teachers came increasingly into conflict with Government economic policies (in so far as they impacted upon their pay in particular) the oft-expressed choice between militancy and self-government became increasingly less realistic. Self-government, if on offer at all, could only be within the economic and political constraints imposed by central government. To many it appeared that the decision was finally taken when the two largest teacher unions joined blue-collar workers, and an increasing number of white-collar unions, in the Trades Union Congress, the National Association of Schoolmasters in 1968 and the National Union of Teachers in 1970.

National developments were placing considerable pressure upon relationships within the education service in the mid-1970s. To this could be added at a local level the impact upon the service of the reform of the system of local government in England and Wales in 1973 and 1974. The third chapter of the study examines the impact of the reorganisation upon the policy-making process, in particular as it affected the education service, and seeks to identify the significance of the changes for Oxfordshire.

Of especial significance to the education service prior to local government reorganisation was the role of the Association of Education Committees. Developing from the original school boards, education committees above all other local authority committees came to develop a semi-autonomous role within the local government system. Since membership of the education committee was highly prized amongst councillors, length of service on the council was often a prerequisite for membership. Long-serving councillors and aldermen evolved a considerable esprit de corps which further reinforced their commitment to the service as an end in itself rather than as one among a number of local government services. This led to the formation of the Association of Education Committees consisting of representatives from each education committee, but again seeing its role as distinct from that of local authorities themselves.

Following local government reform the Association of Education Committees was disbanded and its work undertaken by the Association of County Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. The

creation of the Council of Local Education Authorities/School Teachers committee was never to replace the Association of Education Committees, confining itself to consideration of teachers' conditions of employment. This change was symptomatic of a trend towards the increasing subjugation of the education service to the needs and strategies of the council itself. The reorganisation also saw the end of the alderman in local government, and to a considerable extent (certainly at county council level) the replacement of many long-serving councillors with less experienced members.[1] Given the ethos which underpinned the reorganisation - a wish to make local government more professional[2] and to attract a higher calibre of local government officer and councillor - the role of the education committee was bound to come under close scrutiny and tighter control.

Along with the revision of local government boundaries, the creation of a two-tier system of local government and the reallocation of responsibilities between the two tiers, went a firm commitment to the principles of corporate management. Most readily symbolised by the creation of Chief Executive posts throughout the system, the proponents of local government reform sought to emphasise the corporate nature of the authority by incorporating into their reforms structures which ensured strong centralised decision-making at the expense of the service committees. To this end most local authorities created policy and resources committees which concentrated political power in the hands of a relatively small group of influential politicians.

The impact of the reorganisation in Oxfordshire is explored in terms of boundary revisions (most notably the incorporation of a large part of North Berkshire into the new County), the reallocation of powers (particularly the removal of responsibility for education from Oxford Borough Council and its reallocation to Oxfordshire County Council), and the introduction of corporate management techniques into the work of the County Council.

Clearly, the Oxfordshire dispute centred on the question of financial resources and the relationship between central and local government in policy-making, especially the financial aspects of that relationship. Although not directly linked to the reform of the system of local government, the serious financial background at the time of the reorganisation meant that these questions were very much to the fore at that point in time. Therefore, the chapter dealing with local government reform also examines the evolving central-local government relationship as it impacts upon the education service, and also explores issues relating to the funding of the local government service. The uncertainty and, to a certain extent, the ambivalence of this relationship underpins the Oxfordshire dispute.

The fourth chapter of the study examines the principal theoretical approaches to policy-making in the education service with a view to identifying the insights which each theory might provide for a study of the Oxfordshire dispute. It needs to be recognised at the outset that the adoption of a case study approach in itself predisposes one towards a pluralistic analysis of events and in undertaking this study I would

make no secret of my own predisposition to adopt the pluralist approach as that which most closely accords with the practical reality of the policy-making process. Nevertheless each of the theoretical approaches provides a distinctive method for analysing the events of the dispute and providing an account of the underlying factors which seeks to explain why events occurred, which forces were actually at work and how these shaped the development of the dispute.

The four theoretical approaches which are studied are systems theory, Marxism, pluralism and neo-liberalism. An attempt is made to outline the main aspects of each approach and then its applicability to the events in Oxfordshire is evaluated.

Systems theory is a mechanistic approach towards the study of policy-making which analyses events largely by reference to the processes by which decision-makers are made aware of the wants and demands of the system which they seek to control and through which they make appropriate responses in order to ensure the continuing viability of their regime.[3] In seeking to apply systems theory to a study of a specific instance of policy-making it is necessary to highlight the significance of the generation and maintenance of support in determining the actions of the policy-makers.

Systems theory views pressure groups as demand regulators who convert their members' wants into a credible programme of demands to which the regime may respond appropriately. Needless to say, those in authority will find themselves faced with conflicting demands and their policy-

making decisions, or outputs, will reflect their perception of the relative effectiveness of measures in terms of generating or maintaining support. In the Oxfordshire dispute there can be no doubt that once the County Council had taken the decision to reduce significantly the level of its expenditure upon the education service, the National Union of Teachers sought to erode public support for the ruling group. To that extent the conflict may be seen as a process by which both parties sought to determine the extent to which the level of specific support for those in authority might be eroded by a pressure group concerned to protect and advance the interests of a particular part of the local authority's activities.

The study pays particular attention to the role of pressure groups from the viewpoint of systems theory since the role of one such group, the National Union of Teachers, is crucial to an appreciation of the Oxfordshire dispute. From an appreciation of the events of the dispute it is then possible to identify the extent to which the National Union of Teachers behaved in accordance with the expected role of a pressure group from the systems theorist's perspective. The theory can also be applied to other aspects of the Oxfordshire dispute and an analysis of the events of the dispute in terms of systems theory is attempted.

The Marxist approach to the study of policy-making is based upon certain fundamental beliefs about the nature of capitalist society. Firstly, it views capitalist society as being typified by inequalities in wealth, power and influence based primarily upon the contrast between those who own and control the means of production and those who are required to

sell their labour in order to live. Secondly, the institutions of the state have as their primary purpose to ensure the continuation of the economic system; the various institutions therefore serve to provide a compliant workforce and to reduce to a minimum any opposition to the prevailing order. In its crudest manifestation Marxism views the social and political superstructure of society as being determined by and subservient to the economic base of the society.

Most Marxist theorists today concentrate upon the contradictions which they believe to be inherent in a society which is based upon a need to utilise social institutions in order to sustain the economic system. It has been recognised that these institutions themselves may develop a degree of autonomy from the economic system as a consequence of the values engendered by the particular institution. Thus the education system may develop an ethos of its own which will on occasion come into conflict with the needs of the economic system. As the education system serves its purpose of producing a skilled workforce it also generates a value system which emphasises self-advancement through education; when the needs of the economy dictate that education spending be frozen or reduced then the potential for conflict between the 'educationalists' and the economists is clearly present.

Thus resistance to the perceived subjugation of social institutions to economic interests is not only possible but, given the nature of capitalist economic development, inevitable. What is of key importance to Marxists however is the question of agenda setting. Although capitalist society can permit a degree of autonomy for social

institutions with the consequent possibility of modifications to state policy, certain issues may never be permitted to reach the political agenda. The social and political superstructure must still ensure the continuation of the capitalist system and therefore limits are imposed upon what is possible by way of modification of either social institutions or the policies of the state. Nevertheless, diversity in provision is possible within the parameters as defined by the needs of the economy.

The study seeks to apply this theory to the events of the Oxfordshire dispute in part by applying it as a critique of the view that education policy-making is distinguished by the operation of pluralism and a high degree of consensus. It explores some of the problems of applying Marxist theory to case studies of local education authority policy-making and seeks to identify some of the issues which Marxists would see as having been precluded from the agenda in the policy-making processes of the dispute.

Pluralism as a theory of policy-making is closely identified with the liberal political outlook of the western democracies. In its original form pluralism viewed political power and influence as widely distributed throughout society with no one group able to impose its will upon the others. Policy-making is thus viewed as the outcome of the interplay of various interest groups (and affected, if unorganised, interests) in the process within a neutral setting. Pluralism thus concentrates upon the political process itself rather than upon seeking to identify the locus of power within society; it seeks to identify

those groups which contributed towards the policy-making process and to ascertain the extent to which each group was able to influence that process.

Pluralism has been subjected to much criticism not least for its insistence that no serious concentrations of power are to be found and its assumption that all interest groups are capable of competing equally and influencing the policy-making process to an equal degree. The theory has come to be modified by many of its proponents in response to these criticisms. 'Bounded pluralism' or 'pluralism II' recognises that a range of primary issues, such as the economic structure of the society, are effectively excluded from the policy-making agenda by powerful vested interests within the society. Interest group activity and effective pluralist politics operate at the secondary level only.

Insofar as pluralism seeks to identify the contribution made to the policy-making process by the various groups involved it lends itself readily to the case study approach to the analysis of decision-making which concentrates upon identifying specific inputs, the role of pressure groups and their impact upon policy formulation. Thus, a study of the Oxfordshire dispute which seeks to analyse the influence exercised by one particular pressure group, the National Union of Teachers, must consider the extent to which pluralistic assumptions about the wide distribution of power are applicable. The study seeks to apply pluralist theory to the events of the dispute not only through a study of the role of the pressure group and its impact upon the policy-

making process, but also by examining the extent to which the policy-making agenda was open for discussion.

The final theoretical approach covered by the chapter on policy-making is neo-liberalism. This is an approach towards policy-making which gained significant support during the 1970s and which exposed public services in particular to sustained criticism. According to the neo-liberal approach the welfare state, which had been created in order to serve the needs of the various client groups, had in fact been hijacked by those employed to provide the service in order to advance their own interests. Partly for this reason neo-liberals believe that private provision of services and the operation of market forces provides a more effective and efficient means for providing services.

The neo-liberal critique was forcefully applied to publicly provided education. In the first instance, neo-liberals argued, the substantial expenditure of public money upon the education service had failed to produce either the social harmony or the economic expansion which had been promised. Furthermore, the trends in education policy were antipathetic to the wishes of the clients in the form of the parents. Comprehensive education, 'progressive' teaching techniques, the development of social studies and humanities within the curriculum, and the move away from the use of corporal punishment were all cited as examples of educational trends which did not match parental aspirations for schools which were well-disciplined with high academic standards and a curriculum which would prepare pupils for the world of work.

According to the neo-liberal view the failure of the education service to produce appropriate results from the substantial resources expended upon it results largely from the dominance over the policy-making process of those employed to provide the service. Resources had been used to increase teachers' salaries, provide ample and index-linked pensions and improve working conditions. Free from the constraints imposed by the operation of market forces and the consequent need for efficiency there was no incentive to provide value for money. Similarly, the trends in education policy reflected not the operation of market forces in the shape of parental preference, but of the preoccupations of the teaching profession. Neo-liberals emphasised parental choice and diversity of provision as being essential prerequisites for ensuring that the service would be responsive to the wishes of its client group, the parents. Fundamental, of course, to this approach is the belief that individuals, in this case parents, have a better knowledge of what is good for them than do the bureaucrats and 'professionals' providing the service.

The study draws attention to the emergence of neo-liberal ideas within British politics in general, and Oxfordshire in particular, at the time of the Oxfordshire dispute. Nor were these ideas confined to one sector of political opinion as even the Labour Government of the day responded to the critique by reducing public expenditure and launching the populist 'Great Debate' on education. The critique is applied to events in Oxfordshire and a neo-liberal account of the dispute is attempted. Whether the theory in toto provides an adequate account of the events of the dispute may be open to question; what cannot be doubted is the

contribution which the critique made to the perceptions of politicians and parents at the time.

The chapter on the policy-making process therefore presents four distinctive approaches to education policy-making and in particular to the Oxfordshire dispute. These serve to highlight the factors and influences which may be seen as accounting for the course of events whilst providing alternative theories for the motivating forces behind the dispute. The attractiveness of an approach which accords closely with the perceptions of those actively involved in events which are the subject of a case study makes pluralism a theory which appears to shed much light upon the policy-making process. We are left to ask, however, whether the perceptions of those most closely involved are necessarily the surest foundation for a theoretical analysis of the policy-making process.

The final chapter of the study draws upon the recollections of some of those closely involved in the events of 1976-77 and attempts to set these within the context of the environmental factors which the study suggests were significant at the time and to the various theoretical approaches to the policy-making process.

The study concentrates upon a single instance of policy-making and inevitably judgements as to the relevance to the study of particular events, or even the starting and finishing points for the study, are value laden. It is hoped, however, that through an analysis of these particular events might be highlighted significant developments in the

relationships within the world of education policy-making as well as those features of the dispute which may have been peculiar to Oxfordshire. Since the time of the dispute much has changed in the world of education and in particular in the role of teachers' pressure group activity in influencing education policy. The study does not seek to consider these further developments but suggests that the sea-change in attitudes may have been evident in the mid-1970s and not, as is often now thought, 1979.

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THE OXFORDSHIRE CAMPAIGN AGAINST EDUCATION CUTS, 1977

The origins of the 1977 dispute over expenditure cuts in the Oxfordshire education service may be traced back to the years 1973 and 1974 which witnessed the reorganisation of the system of local government in England and Wales, and the election in 1974 of a Labour Government whose expenditure policies were orientated towards a redistribution of Government expenditure in favour of the metropolitan authorities with a consequent reduction in the level of Government expenditure in the shire counties such as Oxfordshire. Partly as a result of this, between 1974 and 1976 Oxfordshire had reduced its expenditure plans for the education service by £2,009,690 - cuts which met with a relatively passive response from the teacher associations.

There was certainly a feeling in the minds of many observers of the political scene in Oxfordshire, and not least within the education service, that the ruling Conservative Group on the newly reorganised County Council was anxious to exercise the maximum possible degree of restraint upon the Authority's expenditure as part of their philosophical conviction that excessive public expenditure was a primary factor in the nation's economic difficulties. This was, of course, the point in time at which the Conservative Party was to come under the influence of the monetarist school, the leading proponent of which was the Institute for Economic Affairs which according to William Keegan *"has always lauded the virtues of the price mechanism and the uninhibited market place and has published work calling for market*

forces in such diverse fields as radio, university education and health.....The welfare state and free education" says Keegan *"hold little appeal for such people who would ideally like to charge for everything..."*[1]

The rejection by many in the Conservative Party of the 'consensus' politics of the Heath era, combined with the massive increase in the rate of inflation following the election of the Labour Government in 1974, led many Conservative politicians to adopt an increasingly critical attitude towards public expenditure in general. Keegan describes Conservative thinking at this time, perhaps somewhat irreverently, as being divided into two monetarist factions: *"the unthinking right wing believed that cutting public spending, bashing the poor and so on was a laudable activity in itself; the thinking right wing believed such things needed to be done because the level of public spending was a threat to liberty and to economic performance."*[2] If these perceptions of the Conservative approach towards local services were shared by Oxfordshire County Council employees, and it would seem that they were by many, then it is not difficult to understand the anxiety of the Council's employees that their jobs and services might be under threat. Within the Oxfordshire education service there would appear also to have been a widespread feeling that the education service was particularly threatened by this group who reflected the view that state education had failed the nation in economic terms at the same time that it had drastically increased its burden on the taxpayer and ratepayer.

This trend of a far more critical attitude towards public expenditure by local councillors was not, of course, confined to Oxfordshire although with Oxfordshire's reputation for a progressive approach towards primary education in particular, the legacy of previous Chief Education Officers whose views prevailed upon local councillors, it provided an easier target than many other local education authorities. In Oxfordshire, however, the combination of several leading Conservative 'academics', the incorporation into the new Oxfordshire of a substantial part of north Berkshire, traditionally a 'hard line' authority, an enthusiasm for corporate management techniques, and the Labour Government's harsh treatment of the County in terms of Rate Support Grant settlement provided an explosive mixture.

Two leading Conservative county councillors in Oxfordshire at the time were Vernon Bogdanor and John Redwood, both of whom were contributors to 'The Conservative Opportunity' which was published in 1976 and was indicative of the reappraisal being undertaken by the Conservative Party following its defeat in the 1974 General Election. In his contribution to this book (on the subject of education) Bogdanor drew attention to what he saw as the collapse of the post-war consensus within the education service, with the rapid advance of the comprehensive system and an associated scepticism concerning traditional teaching methods. He believed that *"local authorities are part of the very administrative consensus whose theoretical underpinnings have collapsed; and through their bureaucratic insensitivity to the wishes of parents, and their seeming indifference to educational standards, they bear a considerable responsibility for the widespread popular alienation from local*

government.."[3] According to Bogdanor there was a divide between the administrators (both local and national), leaders of teacher unions, educational journalists and progressive politicians on the one hand, and parents on the other. This powerful coalition had led to a situation in which *"educational problems were to be solved by throwing money at them and hoping that they would go away."*[4] Perhaps not surprisingly, Bogdanor believed that *"the amount spent on education has never been a good guide to the quality of provision."*[5]

In the same book, in a chapter on 'managing the economy', John Redwood was advocating that *"It is essential to curb the rate of growth in the public sector and to seek more effective use of our resources. The policies required are not easy to implement, as they involve a restoration of financial disciplines and a reversal of so many assumptions fostered by the splurge of public spending in 1974 and 1975."*[6]

Such thinking was not restricted to the Conservative Party and it should also be recalled that the Labour Government was increasingly adopting a monetarist solution to the problems of the economy. Following the major economic crisis which it faced shortly after its election, the Government made it quite clear that its main weapon in the fight against inflation (which was seen as the major problem facing the economy) was to be a reduction in the level of public expenditure. At the same time, the Prime Minister, James Callaghan, launched in 1976 the 'Great Debate' on the alleged shortcomings of the public education system as reflected in the public perception that the education service was failing to meet

the needs of the economy or the needs of individual school pupils. Clearly this was a climate in which education pressure groups, and teacher associations in particular, could be expected to be particularly sensitive to criticism and attempts to reduce spending on education still further.

Although the 1970s had already witnessed a period of retrenchment in the level of educational provision, it was not until the middle of the decade that the cuts began to bite deeply. As early as January 1976 the Deputy Chief Education Officer for Oxfordshire had told a meeting organised by the Oxford Branch of the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education that the educational bonanza was over and, ominously, that with the proportion of any local education authority's budget spent on staff salaries being so large, not many major cuts could be made without cutting teachers' jobs. These facts, he told the meeting, made his task onerous and left him little room for manoevre.[7] His difficulties were by no means eased by the subsequent actions of central government.

In July 1976 the Department of the Environment issued Circular 45/76 which called upon local authorities to re-examine urgently their expenditure projections for 1976-77 in the light of reports that total local authority expenditure throughout England and Wales was some 4%-5% above the level provided for in the Rate Support Grant settlement. Local authorities were advised to restrict their 1976-77 expenditure to an amount 9% above the 1975-76 level. Oxfordshire had budgeted for a 17% increase in expenditure, thus exceeding the Government guidelines by

some 8%. In order to comply with the Government's July 1976 advice, Oxfordshire would require to reduce its expenditure by some £6.3 million for the financial year1976-77.

Oxfordshire County Council responded to the Government's request by cutting £5 million from its current expenditure, only £½ million of which was to be taken from the education budget. In addition the Policy and Resources Committee asked service committees to look for reductions in manpower and to consider staffing for the future within 1976-77 levels. Although these cuts were opposed by the teacher associations they were somewhat more alarmed by proposals which were made for a further £5 million expenditure cut for the financial year 1977/78, £3¼ million of which was to be from the education budget. It is worthy of note that neither the size of the proposed cut nor the details of the effects of the cuts were placed before the Education Committee until December.

Local National Union of Teachers' leaders, Jack Stedman and Mervyn Benford told the local newspaper in September that "*What disturbs teachers about cuts like these is the additional fact that they have never been before the Education Committee, having been drawn up more or less to the order and design of the Policy and Resources Committee. To by-pass the statutory Education Committee in this way, and the chief officer and his staff is ominous. It paves the way for an oligarchic dictatorship of education quite against the best traditions, practices and beliefs of this country, challenging thereby the professional integrity and conduct of teacher and administrator alike.*"[8] In this they

echoed the concerns of many involved with education policy-making at the time of local government reorganisation in 1973-74. The introduction of policy and resources committees and corporate management techniques into local government held the threat of an erosion of the influence of education committees and teachers in the policy-making process. It was this fear which Stedman and Benford clearly believed had manifested itself as reality in the proposed expenditure cuts in Oxfordshire.

In his review of the position of the education service in Oxfordshire in 1976, the Chief Education Officer, John Garne, reported that in comparison with the level of expenditure which would have been required in order to maintain standards there had been a reduction of some £2,009,690 in expenditure on the service between the financial years 1974-75 and 1976-77 (at 1975 prices). The effect of the education cuts which had taken place prior to 1977 can be judged by the comments of the Chairman of the Education Committee at the time who said "*...short of closure of certain educational institutions and/or the total abandonment of specific areas of the Education Service, for example Adult, Youth and Community Service, the only remaining way to reduce expenditure is a savage reduction of the total teacher salary costs.*" and "*..beyond teachers, there is little left to cut.*"[9]

At this stage the plans involved an anticipated reduction of some 508.3 full-time equivalent teachers, 444 of them in primary and secondary schools, which would produce an estimated saving of £1,414,010. The effect of these cuts would be to increase the pupil/teacher ratio by 2 in both the primary and secondary sectors, to 25.5 to 1 in primary and

19.0 to 1 in secondary; it was stressed by those who defended this policy that this worsening of the pupil/teacher ratios would only have the effect of reverting to the levels of 1972-73. One councillor defended this decision by stating that the subsequent improvement of the pupil/teacher ratios over the years had not resulted in an improvement in the quality of teaching, a point of view which was gaining in support at the time as more came to question whether the education service was producing the results which increased expenditure over the previous two decades had led them to expect. Such disenchantment with the results of sustained post-war growth in educational expenditure was to be reflected in the increasing influence of neo-liberal views of the role of public servants who were seen as concerned primarily to secure their own interests at the expense not only of the taxpayer, but also of their client groups.

The Council expected to make between 274 and 382 savings by placing an embargo on new appointments, by redeployment of staff to vacant posts and by offering premature retirement compensation to certain teachers. Of course there were other proposed cuts, not least a 20% cut in capitation allowances and further reductions in the provision of music tuition, the schools' museum service, the schools' library service etc. There can be no doubt that all these cuts were reluctantly proposed by the then Chairman of the Education Committee who commented that a consequence would be a downturn in standards of literacy and that *"most schools are already unable to provide sufficient text books and paper without substantial help from parents. The situation next year"* he said *"will be much worse"*.[10]

These expenditure cuts were to be discussed by the County Council on 21 September 1976 (still not having been placed before the Education Committee) and the teacher associations decided upon a half day strike and rally for that day in conjunction with other local authority unions. Immediately prior to the strike (13 September) the Regional Official for the National Union of Teachers wrote to the newly appointed Secretary of State for Education expressing the Union's concerns and requesting an intervention by the Department of Education and Science. His letter said:

"Dear Mrs. Williams,

"I write on behalf of the Oxfordshire Division of the N.U.T. May I first offer my congratulations on your recent appointment as Secretary of State for Education and Science and wish you every success in this office.

"I regret that I also have to inform you of a crisis facing education in Oxfordshire. The Policy and Resources Committee of the Council, at its meeting on 7th September, approved cuts totalling £5 million in estimates for 1977-78. Of this amount £3¼ million is to be taken from education which will entail reducing the teaching force by 508 (which will involve considerable redundancies), a worsening of the Pupil/Teacher ratio by two whole points, a cut in capitation of 20% in all schools, and many other cuts across the board.

"These cuts are to be considered by the County Council at its meeting on 21st September. The N.U.T. have called a ½ day strike on that day and other unions are expected to come out in protest at the cuts. NUPE have already declared strike action; NATFE and NAS are also expected to join in.

"I feel you should know that the controlling group on the Council lose no opportunity, in their public statements, of blaming the Government for these cuts. They say that what they are doing is simply and solely a response to Government circulars. The Union believes this is untrue; that nothing in Government circulars would indicate the necessity of cuts of this order.

"It would be most helpful to our cause if you would publicly intervene to declare your views. I realise that in the past the Government has felt unable to intervene directly, once the RSG settlement has been made, but I have been impressed during the past week by David Ennals' statement on the proposed Social Service cuts in Bury, and feel that a similar stand on behalf of education in Oxfordshire is no less justified.

I hope you will feel able to help us in this urgent matter."

The reply (dated 23 September - after the County Council meeting of 21 September) from Clive Booth, Private Secretary, gave the Union little grounds for optimism:

"Dear Mr Fox,

"The Secretary of State has asked me to thank you for your letter of 13 September congratulating her on her appointment, and to reply to the points you have made about expenditure in Oxfordshire in 1977-78.

"I understand that the County Council were at their meeting on Tuesday giving consideration to their 1977-78 estimates in advance of the Rate Support Grant negotiations, and on the basis of contingency proposals from their Policy and Resources Committee which had implications for education such as you describe. The County Council will no doubt have been doing so in the light of the joint departmental

Circular issued on 26 August about local authority expenditure in 1976-78. In this Circular, local authorities were asked to seek further savings in their current expenditure during the remainder of 1976-77, and informed that the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance accepted that local authorities' total expenditure in 1977-78 should overall comply with the levels set out in last February's White Paper "Public Expenditure to 1979-80" (Cmnd 6395). No guidance was given in the Circular on what should be done in respect of individual services: the Circular stated: "local authorities will know of the advice given in previous circulars on how to deal with reductions but should themselves decide how the reductions in expenditure in 1976-77 and 1977-78 should be allocated as between their services in the light of their own circumstances and their own priorities". Thus on this basis it is for each individual authority to make the decisions, and to defend them locally, and there is no basis on which the Secretary of State could intervene.

"At the Secretary of State's request, this office has been in touch with a senior official of the County Council to establish that no final decisions will be taken until the Education Committee has studied the implications of the cuts proposed for education. We understand that the County Council have also decided to seek a meeting with the Secretary of State for the Environment, in order to put to him the impact of Government policies on services in Oxfordshire."

The strike action which took place on 21 September did indeed draw support from outside the teaching profession and in particular from other public employees' unions who were also threatened by the proposed

cuts in the Local Authority's expenditure. In the view of Jack Stedman, the N.U.T.'s Divisional Secretary for Oxfordshire, this strike and the proposed ballot of N.U.T. members for further action would nip these cuts in the bud.[12] With hindsight, however, he could see that the Council viewed the protests as more than simply an exercise in pressure group activity. In an article written for a local newspaper at the end of the dispute Stedman was to say that *"From the beginning the County Council saw the dispute as a challenge to its legal authority over fiscal priorities."*[11] It can be safely assumed that a political group which sees excessive public expenditure as a major factor in the nation's economic problems was not about to hand over decisions on public expenditure to local pressure groups whose primary role was perceived as being to obtain increased expenditure on their services! In the event, at the County Council meeting on 21 September the proposals from the Policy and Resources Committee were approved in principle but the Council withheld final approval until the level of the Rate Support Grant settlement was known. The Leader of the Council, however, made the ruling group's position quite clear when he said that *"those members who would have us delay action in the hope of a crock of gold at the end of the rainbow, do no service to the people of Oxfordshire or those in the Council's employment."*[13] He was also reported as telling Councillors that there was no point in waiting until late November or December to see how much Government grant Oxfordshire would receive.[14] Nevertheless, the Council agreed to defer a final decision pending the announcement of the Rate Support Grant settlement.

In a further defeat for the ruling group, with the support of seven Conservative Councillors and a united Labour, Liberal and Independent alliance, the Council resolved that a deputation be sent to meet the Secretary of State for the Environment in order to register their concern at the effect of the cuts upon Oxfordshire's services. The proposal had been strongly opposed by the majority of the ruling Conservative group.

When, in November, the overall Rate Support Grant settlement was known it confirmed the Council's fears as the level of Government support to local authorities was cut from an average of 65.5% to 61%; when the level of grant for Oxfordshire was subsequently announced this turned out to be only 54%. When set against the average level of Rate Support Grant for the shire counties, Oxfordshire was one of the three worst hit authorities in terms of the level of Rate Support Grant, and indeed was also one of the three hardest hit by changes in the formula for calculating the level of Rate Support Grant since the financial year 1974/74. 1977/78 was therefore to be a particularly difficult year for the Council following upon several years in which the level of Government support had been steadily eroded.

By the time the full Education Committee finally discussed the proposed expenditure cuts on 30 December 1976 the £3.25 million cuts were approved and the level of staff cuts in schools remained 464 from the planned staffing establishment, 444 from the existing establishment. The Government had made it clear to local authorities that it considered there to be adequate provision within the Rate Support Grant settlement

to maintain staffing levels in schools; nevertheless Oxfordshire was anticipating redundancies among its teaching force. Planning for this eventuality had already begun since the overwhelming majority of appointments to the Authority's teaching establishment in September 1976 had been made on fixed term (one year) contracts in the belief that this might lessen the impact of future staff reductions. At this point in time 'Education' reported on the Education Committee's meeting and the proposed cuts in staffing, and concluded that *"if this target has to be reached during 1977/78 there are bound to be compulsory redundancies, perhaps around 100."*[15]

At the Education Committee meeting on 30 December the Chairman of the Education Committee, Councillor Cross, made his position clear and reported receiving many letters and petitions expressing concern at the proposed cuts. He said *"I have learnt nothing of substance from all these letters, but a great deal about the Public concern and the Public lack of understanding of our present problems...I believe that one must follow the directives of the Government, whether one supports it or not, and I wish the Teachers... to know that I personally believe that cuts of the magnitude detailed in our papers, have to be made if we are to conform to the Government's requirements."*[16] In a plea to the Policy and Resources Committee,however, he continued: *"Therefore, can the Policy and Resources Committee devise any financial method so that we can have longer time, if that is necessary, as I think it will be, to complete redeployment on this scale. I make this request for both Human and Economic reasons."*[17]

Anticipating problems with the Authority over these staffing reductions the N.U.T. had already begun to consider further action, clearly believing that it was unlikely to influence the Authority's actions through its normal consultative channels. In November the nine local associations (branches) of the N.U.T. within Oxfordshire considered the suggestion that members should refuse to take the classes of absent colleagues; at local association meetings held in November only one local association voted against this proposal (by a margin of 27 to 1) but in the other eight associations there were only two votes against action with 348 votes in favour. The approval of the Union's national Executive was sought for a ballot of members prior to the commencement of action. The adoption of such a policy was likely to lead to considerable disruption in schools which to a large extent relied upon their own staff to teach the pupils normally taken by absent colleagues.

Meanwhile, the final details of the proposed 1977/78 budget were being drawn up and this led ultimately to a budget increase of 3.7% over the revised 1976/77 estimated budget, a reduction of 4.8% if inflation is taken into account. It was originally proposed that rates would be increased by 26.3% from 57p to 72p in the pound but before the budget was eventually approved the County Council decided to take the equivalent of a 3p rate from the balances in order to reduce the level of the rate increase. This move was opposed by Labour members of the Council who argued that the £2.7 million in question could be put to better use in reducing the severity of the proposed cuts. During discussions on the budget it became clear that there was considerable disagreement within the ruling Conservative group and this surfaced when

the Chairman of the Council (and himself a member of the Conservative group), Bob Weir, attacked the Conservative group for intransigence and called upon electors in the forthcoming County Council elections to vote for candidates who would stand up for their consciences and not simply toe the party line. This followed an attempt by Weir to have ½p of the equivalent of a 3p rate, which was taken from the balances, put into the education budget. This proposal was fiercely opposed by the majority of the Conservative Group, and Mr. Weir subsequently announced that he would not be seeking re-election to the Council.

Later, the Secretary of Oxfordshire N.U.T. was to identify the rejection of the amendment proposed by the Chairman of the Council as a significant turning point in the dispute. *"This action forfeited any sympathy from teachers like myself, who recognised the enormity of Oxfordshire's Rate Support Grant loss. The large majority of teachers in Oxfordshire were convinced then, and remain convinced, that a dominant part of Oxfordshire County Council cherishes a basic hostility towards education as it is practised here"*[18], he commented.

The N.U.T. duly balloted members on 'no cover' action which commenced in February 1977 when it became clear that the Council had no intention of revising the budget. That the Union had a degree of sympathy for the Council's predicament was indicated by a letter to the press from the Secretary of the N.U.T.'s Oxfordshire Division. Whilst deprecating the proposed cuts, Mr.Stedman said: *"...we should direct our opposition more towards Whitehall than County Hall and we should support the County*

Council in protesting against the iniquitous Oxfordshire Rate Support Grant and seek redress both in the future and in the interim."[19]

It was the local Labour Party's view that the level of the Rate Support Grant settlement was not alone to blame for these cuts. They pointed out that the cuts were first outlined in June, long before the Rate Support Grant settlement was announced, and that the cuts planned in June had hardly been altered since. Furthermore, the Council had budgeted for a £1.5 million balance at the end of the financial year 1976/77 but had finished up with a balance of £5.7 million and a contingency fund of £6 million; money which in their view could have been used to obviate the necessity for cuts in services. However, the leader of the Labour Group on the County Council made it quite clear that, notwithstanding the state of Oxfordshire's balances, her group would not acquiesce in any cuts which might follow from the actions of a Labour Government. At the County Council meeting held on 21 September she told councillors that this sort of treatment (the forked tongue and £5 million cuts) was not what she expected from a socialist government and it wasn't what she was going to put up with. She was prepared to confront the Labour Government to show them the error of their ways.[20]

The details of the County's budget having been settled, the education budget still showed a £3¼ million reduction with a proposed cut of 9% of the planned teaching force - a reduction of 464 jobs. The pupil/teacher ratio for 1977/78 was expected to be 26.2 to 1 for the primary sector and 18.5 to 1 for the secondary sector (reflecting a modification of the effects of the cuts in favour of secondary schools at the expense of

primary schools). The authority was at least more confident about avoiding redundancies among its full-time permanent teaching force, although it was offering no guarantees to this effect. The teachers at most risk were the 182 full-time teachers employed on fixed-term contracts (due to expire on 31 August 1977) and the 352 part-time teachers, all of whom were employed on fixed term contracts.

It should be stressed that the majority of these fixed term appointments were made as an act of policy by the Authority in order more easily to effect reductions in the teaching establishment. A few fixed term appointments were for reasons which were acceptable to the unions, for example to cover the absence of a teacher on secondment, but the unions (and particularly the N.U.T.) had never accepted that such contracts should be used to safeguard against the need to reduce teacher numbers at a future date. Most of the teachers employed on fixed term contracts would have established their employment protection rights by the end of their contract and could, for example claim unfair dismissal at an Industrial Tribunal. It is clear that, in law, the failure of the Council to renew these contracts would be interpreted as dismissal - a fact which would appear to have escaped at least the Chief Education Officer and Leader of the Council who both subsequently claimed to have been surprised when the National Union of Teachers drew this fact to their attention.

On the basis of the ½ day strike in September, and the ballot results for future action, the N.U.T. felt that its members in Oxfordshire (some 2500 teachers) would be willing to take even stronger action to protect

the jobs of their colleagues and the pupil/teacher ratio in the schools. It was still felt that, if pushed, the Authority would draw on its reserves from the underspending of other departments in order to renew most, if not all, fixed term contracts. It is clear that, to a certain extent, the N.U.T. expected a relatively easy victory for which the Union would take most of the credit. As a result, the Union balloted its members on further action which would involve refusing to teach classes above an as yet unspecified size; withdrawal from lunchtime supervision (a voluntary activity since 1968), and possible strike action. They also sought a national deputation from the Union to the Authority, an indication, perhaps, that they believed consensus might still exist at a national level even when it had disappeared at local level.

Fortuitously, or otherwise, the Council discovered in March that they had miscalculated the effect of 'incremental drift' on the teachers' salary bill following their 1976 pay settlement, and an extra £¼ million was found to be available within the education budget. It was decided, in consultation with the teacher associations, that this money would be used to employ a further 80 teachers for 1977/78, thus reducing the pupil/teacher ratios to 25.9 to 1 in primary and 18.1 to 1 in secondary schools. At the same time, ratepayers in Oxfordshire were receiving an explanatory note with their rate demands which told them that education cuts *"will not mean sacking teachers"*.[21]

The N.U.T. sent a national deputation to meet with the Council on 29 April 1977. It was by now clear that there was little threat to the jobs of the permanent teaching force; the Authority was anticipating that

natural wastage would reduce the permanent establishment in schools to 4166 by the end of the school year, and this was well within their budget target of 4389 teachers. These figures excluded those teachers who were employed on fixed term contracts. With premature retirement compensation expected to account for a further 63 teachers, this would mean that a substantial number of teachers employed on fixed term contracts could be retained. Approximately 150 full-time equivalent posts were still felt to be at risk. The N.U.T. had made it clear, however, that as well as seeking to protect the employment of their members they were anxious not to see a worsening in the pupil/teacher ratios. The Authority's figures went a small way towards resolving the problem of redundancies but still meant a reduction of 334 teachers' jobs from the level of staffing which would be required to maintain the pupil/teacher ratios. The deputation was told that there was no chance of the policy decision on the pupil/teacher ratio being revoked.

At their meeting with the Authority on 29 April the Union pressed, unsuccessfully, for a guarantee of future employment for all teachers currently employed on fixed term contracts. Although the Authority was not prepared to concede this it was agreed that a working party would be established in order to ascertain the precise number of teachers whose continued employment was under threat. The working party would not, however, be in a position to report before the County Council elections of May 1977.

In the County Council elections the ruling Conservative group took 61 out of the 69 seats on the Council - a significant increase in their

previous majority. However this result would appear to be an accurate reflection of the voting pattern throughout the country where there was a substantial swing against the Labour Party, and there was no indication of an exceptional swing towards the ruling group on Oxfordshire County Council. Nevertheless, this was clearly a great disappointment to the National Union of Teachers and others involved in the campaign against the spending cuts. The newly elected County Council was immediately faced with a strong vote for action by N.U.T. members. By the 26 May deadline for the return of ballot papers 88.65% of N.U.T. members had voted, and of the votes cast 90.1% (79.97% of the total membership) had voted to refuse to teach 'oversize' classes; 87.71% (77.76% of the total membership) had voted to withdraw from lunchtime supervision, and 78.45% (69.54% of the total membership) had voted in favour of strike action. The Union's rules required a two-thirds majority of members in favour of action in each school before action could take place in that school, and this was achieved in 192 schools for class size action, 184 schools for withdrawal from lunchtime supervision and 158 schools for strike action, out of 247 schools from which replies were received.[22] It was decided that withdrawal from lunchtime supervision would begin on 13 June, class size action on 20 June and that strike action would be actively considered. It was also decided that the Union should seek a further meeting with the Council.

It might be expected that the Union's resolve would have been hardened by the result of the ballot and certainly the N.U.T. was later to feel that the County Council election results had led not only to a change of personnel but also a toughening of attitudes on the part of the Council.

Against this inauspicious background the N.U.T. met once again with the Authority on 9 June, a meeting which was eventually to last for nine hours. This was to be the first meeting at which the employer's side would be led by the newly elected Chairman of the Education Committee, Brigadier Roger Streatfield.

The working party which had been established following the previous meeting between the Union and the Authority had identified some 150 full-time equivalent posts as being at risk. A total of 4166 teachers would still be in the employ of Oxfordshire County Council on permanent contracts at the end of the academic year, the latest resignation date for 31 August having passed by this time. If all those teachers who would, by the end of the academic year, have established their rights to employment protection under appropriate legislation (at that time this meant all those employed for at least 26 weeks at 16 hours per week or more or five years at eight hours per week or more) were added to these figures, then the 'surplus' was reduced to 33.2 teachers with an actual deficit of 20.3 in the secondary sector but a surplus of 53.5 in the primary sector. Added to these figures were the 214 teachers (a full-time equivalent of 124.2) who would not have established their employment protection rights; all of these teachers plus the 'surplus' 53.5 full-time equivalents in the primary sector with established employment protection rights were 'at risk'.

By the time of the meeting on 9 June some teachers on fixed term contracts had resigned in order to take up posts elsewhere, some had indicated that they did not wish their contracts to be renewed, and some

had been found permanent employment with the Authority. When account was taken of the 'acceptable' use of fixed term appointments which would not be renewed, only 20 teachers in the secondary sector were still 'at risk'. The position in the primary sector was not clear. The Chief Education Officer offered his opinion that the position might be reached where about 100 full-time teachers' posts would be surplus to requirements. The Authority felt unable to offer a 'no redundancy' guarantee to these teachers.

After a break of one hour during which the two sides reviewed their respective positions the Council offered to retain the services of all full-time teachers (except those covering for secondments etc.) and all part-time teachers who had established their employment protection rights, who were employed in March 1977, until March 1978. In return for this offer it was expected that the N.U.T. would call off its sanctions and accept the new pupil/teacher ratios. The Union rejected this offer immediately but did indicate that a favourable settlement on the question of fixed term contracts would help the position on pupil/teacher ratios. Clearly, however, a settlement on the redundancy issue alone would be insufficient to lead the N.U.T. to call off all its planned action. Throughout the dispute the N.U.T. insisted that the issue of the pupil/teacher ratio was as important as the question of jobs; whether this was quite the case may be open to doubt but it might help to explain the reluctance of the Authority to concede ground on the question of redundancies at an early stage lest they might find themselves in the position of having made concessions in order to

resolve one issue only to find themselves embroiled directly in a further dispute.

The afternoon session resumed with the teachers offering to suspend their class size action and strikes for the rest of the term, and to defer their action over lunchtime supervision for two weeks if the Council would agree to maintain the present teaching force in employment and undertake further negotiations on the issue of the pupil/teacher ratios. The Authority felt that it had to insist upon the March 1978 time limit and the view was expressed that the Conservative group on the Council would not agree to any commitment for the 1978/79 budget before the Rate Support Grant settlement for 1978/79 was known. At this point the N.U.T. clarified its position in respect of teachers covering for colleagues absent on secondment or maternity leave, and even went so far as to say that they would accept non-renewal of a fixed term contract where the individual concerned had been given a clear indication at the time of the appointment that his/her services would not be required beyond the expiry of the contract due to the projected fall in pupil numbers at their particular school. Although it was agreed that the Council could go a long way towards meeting the Union, they felt that the March 1978 deadline must remain or, failing this, there must be an implicit agreement that any guarantee of employment would be until March 1978 only.

After a further break the Chairman of the Education Committee told the meeting that an impasse had been reached. The Authority, he felt, had offered £½ million in order to resolve the dispute but the Union was

only offering a two week delay in its action. The Authority would continue to strive by review of the 1977/78 budget and by virement to alleviate the effects of the February budgeted pupil/teacher ratios. At this point Brigadier Streatfield was asked to clarify the position with regard to the 80 posts added to the February budget following the discovery in March of an 'extra' £¼ million, as the Union was of the view that an on-going commitment had been given in respect of these posts. When it was confirmed that the posts were deemed by the Authority to be for 1977/78 only this effectively ended the negotiations.

There can be little doubt that the N.U.T. was extremely disappointed not to have reached a settlement at this meeting and felt that the attitude of the Authority had hardened to the extent where a negotiated settlement was all but impossible to achieve. The Union President, John Gray, reported that *"During the day it became clear to the Union that no financial obstacle stood in the way of an offer of employment to all of those teachers at present under threat"*. With regard to the 80 'saved' posts he commented *"as far as we are concerned this was a change of policy since the election and explained why the Authority was reluctant to offer safeguards beyond March 1978"*.[23] Clearly he was a disappointed man!

Following the breakdown of talks on 9 June the N.U.T. sent 70,000 letters to Oxfordshire parents explaining why their action was necessary. Plans for strike action were drawn up. A meeting of the Teachers' Joint Consultative Committee was used by the Council to initiate the local disputes procedure, but save for agreement on the

nature of the dispute ("lowering of staffing standards and the consequential loss of teachers' jobs") nothing was achieved by this since the disputes panel was unable to agree on any recommendations to resolve the dispute.

Apart from an approach to the Council of Local Education Authorities by Oxfordshire County Council, the remainder of June was taken up with public posturing. The Chairman of the Education Committee accused the N.U.T. of intransigence in the face of the authority's concessions and expressed the view that the N.U.T. had no desire to proceed with talks as they would only accept the complete withdrawal of the budget. The Union declared, for its part, that it would suspend all action and refer the dispute to arbitration if the Authority would lift its threat to jobs - its first indication that the jobs issue might have primacy over the question of the pupil/teacher ratio. During this time there is evidence that the N.U.T. was successful in putting over its case to Oxfordshire parents, with many parent-teacher associations expressing their opposition to the cuts. Brigadier Streatfield, Chairman of the Education Committee after the May 1977 County Council elections, was to admit later that he received far more letters in support of the teachers than opposed to their action.

In the period immediately preceding the planned strike action the two parties to the dispute sought to explain their actions to the public at large. A radio 'phone-in' organised by Radio Oxford placed N.U.T. Regional Official, Ray Fox, and Chairman of Education, Roger Streatfield, in the position of responding to questions and opinions

from parents and ratepayers. For the teachers, Ray Fox stressed the N.U.T.'s acceptance of education cuts in the past and emphasised the significance of the proposed cuts in teacher numbers. He claimed that the strike action was not simply defensive, seeking to protect teachers threatened by redundancy, but a determined attempt to defend the critical teacher/pupil ratio and thereby the quality of education in Oxfordshire. He pointed to the Authority's reserve fund of some £2.9 million (after the use of some £2.7 million to reduce the level of rate increase) which he believed could, and should, be used to obviate the necessity for education cuts - instead, some of the money from this fund had been used to reduce the level of rate increase in Oxfordshire.

For the County Council, Brigadier Streatfield described the Authority's position as a compromise between cuts in services and increases in the rates. Education cuts would total only £2.5 million rather than the £3 million which was their real share of the cuts. He claimed that the teachers had refused to discuss the cuts with the Authority, seeking instead their total withdrawal and this in his opinion had contributed to the present situation. The recent local election results indicated, in his opinion, that the electorate in Oxfordshire believed that the council had struck the right balance between increasing the rates and cutting services. The level of parental support for the teachers' action did not surprise him since no-one enjoyed cutting services, but the wider electorate had given the Council a mandate to continue with their policies.

It was clear from Brigadier Streatfield's responses to questions that he believed the N.U.T. had set out to make an example of Oxfordshire in order to deter other education authorities from seeking to make cuts in their education budget. Since the Authority had given an undertaking to retain all fixed-term contract teachers until March 1978 it was, in his view, clear that the dispute was not about jobs but about whether the County Council could ever make cuts in the education service. The N.U.T. response was that only Oxfordshire had proposed to make cuts in teacher staffing levels and that the Union had never refused to discuss education cuts, it had merely refused to suggest to the Authority areas in which cuts might be made.

Strike action began in 36 schools on 28 June, closing 28 and disrupting the remainder. This, the N.U.T. indicated, would involve some 397 teachers and disrupt the education of 14,000 children; the cost to the Union which sustained its members on full pay throughout the strike was some £3,000 per day. The strike elicited considerable parental support and the Union sought to maximise the impact of this. Describing the response from parents, N.U.T. Regional Official, Ray Fox, told Radio 2 listeners on 29 June that the teachers' action had received *"a most magnificent response. Yesterday was the start of the strike and all over the county we had news of parental support expressed in resolutions at teacher meetings, in processions, and in demonstrations in County Hall, and some of these I witnessed myself and they were most moving as a demonstration of parental involvement.....We are now appealing to the public to make clear to the County Council that the County Council is misguided in their interpretation of the recent election results, and*

that in no way was a mandate given to them to put the burden of these cuts on the children."[24]

There can be no doubt that in embarking upon a campaign of strike action the N.U.T. was viewing the dispute in a national context. Fred Jarvis, N.U.T. General Secretary, made this quite clear in 'The Teacher', the N.U.T. newspaper, when he was quoted as saying that *"This strike action marks a major development in the N.U.T.'s action against expenditure cuts.....This should be a warning to other authorities"*. Later, in a speech to striking teachers he told them *"If we lose in Oxfordshire this would have severe repercussions elsewhere. This is why the whole Union supports you in what you are doing"*.[25]

Following a statement in the House of Commons on 28 June by the Under-Secretary of State for Education, Margaret Jackson, that she or the Secretary of State would be willing to meet both sides, hopes were raised that a settlement might be reached through the good offices of the Department of Education and Science. On 4 July a scheduled meeting between the Secretary of State for Education and Science and a delegation from the N.U.T. included discussions on the Oxfordshire situation. Fred Jarvis told the Secretary of State that the Government was necessarily involved in the dispute since the Government's guidelines on staffing were being flouted. During a discussion on the Government's guidance to Local Education Authorities on the maintenance of staffing standards one of the civil servants present stated that this was 'global' guidance, not guidance to individual local education authorities, only for the Secretary of State to contradict this

statement when she said that the advice to maintain staffing standards was advice to individual local education authorities albeit the provision of funds within the Rate Support Grant was on a global basis.[26] The Secretary of State expressed her concern at the situation in Oxfordshire and suggested a joint meeting under an independent chairman or a ministerial chairman.

To say that the N.U.T. was disappointed by the Secretary of State's inaction is perhaps an understatement. In a speech to teachers on strike Max Morris, Chairman of the Union's Action Committee, had called upon *"Shirley Williams to condemn, indeed pillory, the Oxfordshire local authority for its provocative stance towards the teaching profession. It is the Secretary of State's job"* he continued *"to maintain the education service nationally and to see that local authorities maintain it locally. Oxfordshire has shown itself unfit to run its schools and so carry out its obligations to the local community. It has gravely transgressed the Government's guide lines by drastically worsening the staffing of its schools, thus substantially increasing the size of its classes.....*

"Why does Mrs. Williams remain silent? Surely she cannot countenance such blatant defiance by a local authority failing in its elementary duty. She must speak out clearly and publicly in defence of Oxfordshire's children."[27] In other words, it was now time for the Secretary of State to re-establish the consensus on educational provision and ensure that a recalcitrant local authority was brought back into line with other local education authorities.

This request for the active intervention of the Secretary of State reflected the view of the N.U.T. that they had her full support for their campaign. The sense of betrayal felt by the N.U.T.'s Divisional Secretary was no doubt partly due to his previous admiration for Mrs.Williams as a politician, but he was later to conclude that *"Oxfordshire's teachers were wickedly misled by bland Government assurances which were based upon guidelines which were unattainable by this county. In my view, the Secretary of State for Education was particularly unhelpful. Although she made comments which actively encouraged teachers in their campaign against the cuts, she refused to offer a hand in resolving the situation."*[28]

As the N.U.T. strike action drew to a close a demonstration of 1,000 people took place in Oxford and a 21,000 signature petition against the cuts was handed in at County Hall. The degree of parental support for the N.U.T.'s campaign was very much a matter of dispute. The N.U.T. claimed evidence of massive parental support with many parents keeping their children away from school in order to protest at the Authority's proposals to reduce staffing levels and increase pupil/teacher ratios. The Times Educational Supplement, on the other hand, reported that *"The N.U.T. is very much on its own in this dispute. Other teachers' unions appear unenthusiastic, and parents have shown little interest, barring a few animated parent-teacher associations".*[29] There is evidence of support from other trade unionists including the South East Region of the Trades Union Congress and the Oxfordshire County Association of Trades Councils who combined to produce publicity material highlighting the damage which the proposed cuts would do to the education service. In

their pamphlet 'Save Education in Oxfordshire' they drew attention to the apparent contrast between the Authority's treatment of maintained schools and its provision for private education:

"Oxfordshire County Council has chosen to levy the cuts on the sector where the greatest immediate and long term damage will be done. It is noteworthy, however, that there has been no cut in the County's subsidy to private education (£840,000). Mrs Shirley Williams gave the following reply to Dr.Rhodes Boyson in the House of Commons (17 May 1977) on Oxfordshire's cuts in education:-

"I would take the hon. gentleman's strictures a little more seriously, if it were not the case that there has been a very substantial increase in local authority expenditure for independent places for no good reason that I can discover."[30]

The N.U.T. announced that action would be intensified from the start of the next term in September if no settlement was reached in the interim. A half-day strike was threatened for the first day of term, and an additional sanction was announced by which N.U.T. members would refuse to undertake any increased workload resulting from the cuts.

Meanwhile, the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers held "amicable but inconclusive" talks with the Chairman of the Education Committee, after which they too announced tougher sanctions for the next term (they were already operating no cover sanctions) if no solution was reached over the jobs issue. These sanctions would include the refusal to undertake an increased workload. NAS/UWT strategy was apparently to keep children in school and give the Authority an

opportunity to respond by putting more teachers into the schools. The success of the operation, it was stated, was more important than the speed.

As the end of the Summer term approached the prospect of continuing disruption to the County's education service seemed inevitable. The 'Economist' encapsulated the position in which Oxfordshire found itself when it said that:

"Oxfordshire can argue with some justification that it has been squashed cruelly between the usual conflicting commands of central government: save money; keep up standards. As a large rural authority, Oxfordshire lost out to the metropolitan areas in allocation of the rate support grant. The national average of local authority spending covered by the grant is 61%. For Oxfordshire it is only 54%. The Council cites as evidence of its good faith its reinstatement of 80 jobs as soon as it realised that the teachers' pay award was less costly than expected. The authority also claims that natural wastage will mean that fewer teachers will be laid off.

"But that does not affect the basic issue of the pupil/teacher ratio. Nor does it explain why Oxfordshire took on all the 340 teachers it needed last September on fixed-term contracts. There is more at stake in Oxfordshire than one union fighting for jobs for the boys: can national standards be maintained - or raised - without central control?"[31]

During the period following the strike action (and while other disruptive action continued) discussions concerning the Oxfordshire

dispute continued. Following a meeting between the Secretary of State and the County Council. the Association of County Councils approached the teacher associations with a view to arranging further talks. Gordon Cunningham, Education Officer of the Association of County Councils reported "grounds for optimism" that the parties to the dispute could be brought together.[32] The N.U.T. was less than optimistic, reporting that *"Expectations that the Education Secretary, Shirley Williams, would step in to end the dispute, which has already involved an eight day strike, were dispelled after her meeting on Monday with Council and ACC officials...the Minister had only acted as an intermediary."*[33] Henry Clother, N.U.T. Press Officer, said *"We understand the Authority is prepared to enter into informal discussions. What I understand is being discussed is an informal meeting with an independent chairman. At this stage we are at the stage of talks about how you get into a serious conciliation position."*[34]

Eventually a meeting between Oxfordshire County Council and the National Union of Teachers was arranged for 26 August under the chairmanship of a former Senior Inspector of Schools for the Inner London Education Authority, Dr. Lloyd Payling. At this meeting the Council began by saying that jobs had been found for all those teachers employed on fixed term contracts save for 63 teachers (whose contracts represented 35.9 full-time equivalents), and that due to a recalculation of anticipated pupil numbers for 1977/78 it was now expected that the pupil/teacher ratio for primary schools would be 25.2 to 1, and for secondary schools 18.1 to 1. The N.U.T. responded by asking why, in view of the small number of teachers still to be found jobs, the Authority could not

guarantee employment to all teachers presently employed on fixed term contracts. The Authority replied by saying that further consideration would be given to this matter.

Following a break, the N.U.T. announced that if the council would offer continued employment to the 63 teachers still at risk then the Union would suspend all action which was aimed at preventing redundancies, that is strike action and withdrawal from lunchtime supervision. The Council representatives then withdrew and returned to make the following statement:

"The County Council is minded to bring forward on Wednesday a proposal to continue the employment of those persons occupying the 36 full-time equivalent posts, provided that on Wednesday the N.U.T. will be equally prepared to state their position regarding strike action, meal supervision and other sanctions."[35]

On 31 August a further meeting took place, this time involving all the teacher associations, at which the Authority confirmed its offer of 26 August of permanent appointments for the remaining fixed term contract teachers, and agreed to maintain the primary teaching force at 1772 and the secondary teaching force at 2573. The 'surplus' numbers would be absorbed over future months until the total of 4345 was reached. In return the N.U.T. agreed to withdraw its threat of strike action and to recommence lunchtime supervision (although this remained, of course, a voluntary activity). By now the anticipated pupil/teacher ratios had been improved from budgeted figures of 26.2 to 1 in primary and 18.5 to 1 in secondary, to 25.2 to 1 and 18.1 to 1 respectively. Before the

dispute these ratios had been 23.5 to 1 (primary) and 17.1 to 1 (secondary) and so although some progress had been made, the teacher associations informed the Council that they remained in dispute over the issue of pupil/teacher ratios. For this reason, and despite evidence of some reluctance on the part of members to continue sanctions, the N.U.T. announced that their class size, no cover, and increased workload sanctions would continue.

The Union's relief at having safeguarded the employment of its members was tempered by anxiety over worsened pupil/teacher ratios and it found itself in a dilemma whereby it sought at the same time to trumpet its success whilst still aiming to maintain the resolve of its members for further action. It was clear that these were, to an extent, conflicting aims but it was this balancing act which the Union sought to perform.

N.U.T. Divisional Secretary, Jack Stedman, appeared to lean towards an early end to action when he said *"I am sure that our members remain resolved to prevent the drastic worsening of the pupil/teacher ratio in the County, but we are relieved that the threat of redundancy which has been hanging over a large number of teachers for the past twelve months has been lifted."*[36] General Secretary, Fred Jarvis, however emphasised the need for further action, saying *"We still have a long way to go to get the Authority to meet our demands on pupil/teacher ratios and therefore we have no alternative but to continue the sanctions."*[37]

The NAS/UWT also indicated that action would continue over pupil/teacher ratios. The talks under Dr. Playdell had succeeded in getting the N.U.T.

off the hook, said Assistant General Secretary Bernard Wakefield, but the attempt at conciliation had failed to re-establish the pupil/teacher ratios.[38] Gordon Cunningham of the ACC was of the opinion that the question of pupil/teacher ratios was not one which could be resolved through the intervention of an independent source. *"Dr. Payling"* he said *"is regarding this as an exercise concluded. The informal discussions have produced a sensible conclusion to the immediate problem - that of fixed term contracts. I don't see pupil/teacher ratios as an issue that can be settled by a conciliator. They are an authority's own and they depend ultimately upon its rate demands, and that is not the object of conciliation."*[39]

The new term began with the N.U.T. continuing its sanctions over the reduced pupil/teacher ratios but with noticeably less enthusiasm on the part of its members for such action. Meanwhile, the Council was hoping to absorb the 'surplus' teachers, whose re-employment had been agreed in August, into their proposed staffing levels of 1772 primary and 2573 secondary teachers.

During October the Policy and Resources Committee of the Council reported a £1.019 million underspend in the Council's 1976/77 budget. Shortly after this the Chief Education Officer informed the N.U.T. that the secondary pupil/teacher ratio would in fact be 18.0 to 1 from January (due to a fall in the number of pupils) and asked the Union to consider calling off its action. The Union declined, but asked for further talks in the light of the reported underspending in the Council's budget (although the education budget was in fact overspent)

in the hope that the money would be used to improve the pupil/teacher ratios. It was rumoured at this time that the money would be spent so as to retain in employment 1836 primary and 2611 secondary teachers (still 42 above the agreed 1772 and 2573 base line) until the end of the academic year; in fact the money was added to the Council's balances.

Following the announcement in November 1977 of a £1.7 million increase in the Government's grants to Oxfordshire for 1978/79, the N.U.T. again sought a meeting with the Authority in order to discuss this development and the underspend in the 1976/77 budget. This meeting took place on 28 November but the Chairman of the Education Committee, Brigadier Streatfield, would only say that it was taking longer to absorb the 'extra' teachers (those whose jobs were saved by the August agreement) than had been hoped, and that the Education Committee had yet to see what could be 'wrung out' of the County Council in order to improve staffing in schools. At this stage it was still intended that the number of teachers employed by the Authority would be reduced from 4345 for the academic year 1977/78 to 4220 for the academic year 1978/79.

The N.U.T. asked the Authority to maintain the pupil/teacher ratios of January 1978 until at least January 1979, in return for which the Union would consider calling off all sanctions. In reality only some 12 primary schools out of a total of 275 were taking action over unfilled vacancies and only 20 to 30 schools were taking class size or no cover action by November 1977.[49] The N.U.T. asked for 4412 teachers to be employed from 1 September 1978 (as against a budgeted figure of 4220) and said that this represented the lowest possible figure which it could

'sell' to its members. Brigadier Streatfield sought a still lower figure from the Union, no doubt recognising the relative ineffectiveness of the Union's action by this time.

Eventually a compromise was reached and the Council issued the following statement:

"The County Council is conscious of the co-operation shown by teachers on such issues as redeployment and welcomes assurances given that this co-operation will continue.

"We are able to put forward the following offer in the confidence that this co-operation will be continued -

1) The County Council will employ 4345 teachers for the academic year starting September 1978, plus the provision for In-service Training in the budget - namely 50 full-time equivalent posts.

2) In addition, the County Council is prepared to continue employment for any teachers at present in their employment who are surplus to establishment in September 1978, but for whom suitable redeployment has not been possible. Such teachers' posts would be phased out as redeployment continues.

3) The number of teachers employed under (2) (above) on September 1 1978, shall not be less than 30, making the total number on September 1st, 1978, not less than 4375 plus the provision for In-service Training - namely, 50 full-time equivalents."[41]

The N.U.T. expected that the pupil/teacher ratios would be no worse in January 1979 than they would be in January 1978 if this settlement was accepted, and amidst some bitter recriminations balloted its members on

the Authority's offer. The ballot produced a 5 to 1 majority in favour of accepting the offer and sanctions were duly called off.

At the end of this prolonged struggle the N.U.T. had managed to avoid the compulsory redundancy of any of its members (or indeed non-members amongst the teaching force), even those previously employed on fixed term contracts. It had, however, been forced to accept worsened pupil/teacher ratios from 23.5 to 1 for the primary sector in September 1976 to an anticipated 24.4 to 1 in January 1979, and from 17.0 to 1 for the secondary sector in September 1976 to an anticipated 17.9 to 1 in January 1979. The Authority had succeeded in reducing its staffing levels against strong Union opposition but had ultimately been forced to accept higher levels of staffing than it had aimed for. N.U.T. Divisional Secretary, Jack Stedman, concluded that *"We have succeeded by our action in halving the staffing cuts in Oxfordshire schools and adding substantially to the outgoing budget for education.*
"Furthermore, N.U.T. strike action and the promise of more to come prevented any teacher from losing her job."[42]

The years following the dispute witnessed a continuing reduction in education spending in Oxfordshire with reductions of some £1.8 million over a three year period. However, no proposals were made to reduce the number of teachers employed, rather an extra 20 teaching posts were budgeted for each year. It is, of course, impossible to know whether the action previously taken over job losses was influential in persuading the Authority to discount this possibility but by diverting the cuts to other areas of education spending further disruptive action was avoided.

The dispute highlighted the shortcomings of the collective disputes procedures, both local and national, in failing to come to terms with the issues which separated the teachers from their employers. To an extent these shortcomings may reflect the novelty of the formal procedures which were developed at the time of local government reorganisation and had not previously been put to the test. Indeed, the very concept of formal procedures to resolve disputes within the education service was anathema to those whose outlook was conditioned by the attitudes of the 1950s and 1960s which emphasised consensus and compromise in policy-making.

Nor had the ground been prepared for conciliation in the dispute. The Authority maintained that the question of the pupil/teacher ratio was one of principle; a matter of public policy to be determined by the elected representatives of the people of Oxfordshire. Whilst concern for the impact of this policy upon their members might be considered legitimate on the part of the unions, their perceived intention to determine the local authority's budget was wholly unacceptable to the Council. During the course of the dispute the teachers were invited to suggest alternative expenditure cuts in the education budget which would meet the Council's revenue objectives; a course of action which the unions could only pursue at the price of alienating a part of their membership or their support among parents. The teachers' refusal to suggest areas for spending cuts served only to reinforce the view among councillors that the campaign was nothing less than a challenge to their right to set a budget for the Council. The county council election results of May 1977 served only to strengthen the view of the ruling

group that their budget reflected the wishes of the whole of the Oxfordshire electorate and thus increased their resolve to resist attempts by vested interests to overturn the budget.

Ultimately, with a seeming inevitability, the dispute was resolved through a compromise. Of particular interest to a student of the policy-making process must be the question of whether the dispute might have been resolved at an earlier stage through such a compromise and, if so, what prevented this. It is clear that at an early stage in the course of events the local leadership of the National Union of Teachers was anxious to alert the Chief Education Officer to the potentially damaging consequences of the Authority's adherence to its proposed policy of reducing dramatically the pupil/teacher ratio. At this stage no real progress was made, partly due to the Chief Education Officer's view of his role as being to implement the policy of the Council rather than to seek to influence councillors to change their policy decisions in the light of teacher opinion. Certainly the view of the Council was that following several years of expenditure cuts there was little left which could realistically be cut in the education service other than the number of teachers employed.

It seems clear that in the early stages of the dispute neither party fully appreciated the strength of feeling of the other. Certainly the local leadership of the National Union of Teachers saw the dispute as a matter of 'nipping in the bud' the Council's original proposals. Similarly it is doubtful whether councillors believed that teachers would resort to strike action over the pupil/teacher ratio. We will

never know whether a commitment to retain in employment all teachers then employed by the Authority (in the Autumn or Spring of the academic year 1976-77) might have sufficiently defused the issue as to avoid significant action by the teachers. Uncertainty on the part of the Authority as to the full impact upon the teaching force of their proposed cuts led them to adopt a cautious approach towards commitments on teacher numbers. As a result the somewhat more emotive issue of redundancies was added to the question of the pupil/teacher ratios and no doubt served to increase support for the N.U.T.'s actions.

Within Oxfordshire the National Union of Teachers was organised into nine local associations (branches), seven of them covering rural Oxfordshire with the Oxford City and Oxford District associations based in and around Oxford itself. For the purposes of deciding upon industrial action each local association can seek approval from the County Division and National Executive for a ballot to take place in the schools within its area. The rules of the Union require that industrial action may only take place where two-thirds of the members within a school have voted in favour of such action. It is significant that all strike action, and most of the effective action short of strikes, took place within the city of Oxford which indicates that teacher support was less than wholehearted throughout the County as a whole.

Since 1977 there has been no significant local dispute between Oxfordshire Education Authority and its teaching force, although the county has been involved in the various national disputes which have taken place during that time.

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THE NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS: PRESSURE GROUP ACTIVITY AND THE CHANGING ECONOMIC CLIMATE

When, in the early 1950's, the education authority in Durham attempted firstly to make trade union membership a requirement for employment as a teacher within the Authority, and later to refuse to exercise discretionary powers with regard to sick leave in favour of non-union members, they incurred the wrath of the teacher associations. In commenting upon the strength of feeling engendered in this dispute Walter Roy, for many years an eminent member of the national Executive of the National Union of Teachers, explained that: *"more than ever before, the teachers felt themselves to be members of a learned profession, whose sense of justice and decency had been outraged by the high-handed action of County Councillors, many of whom had had no education beyond an elementary schooling."*[1]

During the Durham dispute the teacher associations, and primarily the National Union of Teachers, sought to resolve a fundamental disagreement with this particular employer by using the traditional channels for education pressure groups. Ronald Gould, then General Secretary of the N.U.T. said *"We tried to settle the matter by peaceful negotiation, but when this failed we asked teachers in two divisions of Durham County to hand in their notices. Then we notified the Minister, George Tomlinson, of the dispute and asked him to use his powers to resolve it.*
"That weekend a Ministry official phoned me at home to ask me privately if any other solution was possible. I knew of none.....

"On 3 April 1951, the Minister issued a directive that the County Council should refrain from asking questions about Union membership. I do not remember any victory which gave so much joy to so many."[2]

What is noteworthy in Gould's account of this dispute, apart from the unique nature of the matter in dispute, is that the teachers and the Ministry of Education clearly perceived the proposals by Durham Council as a breach in the well established educational consensus. Indeed, the National Union of Teachers appeared almost astonished at the effrontery of an education authority attempting to override the views of the Union; however with the support of the third 'partner' the recalcitrant local education authority was brought back into line.Significantly, the Ministry of Education did not resort to formal structures for consultations with the respective parties to the dispute. A telephone call to the General Secretary of the Union, his assurance that no avenue existed by which the dispute might be avoided other than Ministerial intervention, and a directive was issued. The possibility of using informal consultative procedures and the degree of confidence clearly placed in the judgement of the General Secretary indicate the high standing accorded to the National Union of Teachers at the time.

The National Union of Teachers had reached the status of a legitimised pressure group; one whose views should be sought on all issues pertaining to the education service and whose expertise and 'professionalism' gave authority to its views. Its involvement in the policy-making process ensured that decisions would be made in the light of professional opinion but also that the leadership would in turn

ensure that decisions taken would be accepted by the members - the people who would be required to put such decisions into effect.

The 1944 Education Act had given the Ministry of Education a much greater responsibility for the nation's schools and this had helped to foster, at a national level, a belief that there existed a consensus between the 'professionals' which the parties had an interest in maintaining. Thus in this instance an, at first, reluctant Minister intervened in a dispute between an employer and its employees in order to re-establish the consensus and ensure the continuing smooth delivery of the service.

This consensus was not restricted to relations between the Ministry and the teacher associations. Upon his appointment as General Secretary Designate of the National Union of Teachers in 1946, Ronald Gould received a letter from William Alexander, Secretary of the Association of Education Committees, which said: *"Our respective predecessors did a great deal to foster good relations between the Union and the AEC and I am quite sure that co-operation was beneficial to the service of education. I am more than anxious that in the years that lie ahead this bond should be maintained and strengthened. I want you to know that at any time and in any way, oficially or unofficially, I should be delighted to confer with you on any matter. If I can be of help call on me. Equally, be assured that I shall look to you to help me as opportunity offers."*[35] Gould had no doubt as to the benefits which could be derived from this mutual support, *"I am certain"* he said *"that*

private consultation between Sir William and myself often produced excellent results for teachers."[4]

This relationship was seen as the cornerstone for educational progress. Sir Toby Weaver, former Deputy Secretary at the Department of Education and Science, has said that the education partnership was personified by Gould and Alexander.[5] Fred Jarvis, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers has described their relationship as symbolising the partnership which is based upon the responsibilities of the local education authorities and the teachers. This relationship reflects the role of 'legitimised' pressure groups within the policy making process; groups whose expertise and influence entitles them to be consulted by policy makers when their interests are affected. It is not a relationship which is unique to the education service - for example it is also seen in the relationship between the National Farmers' Union and the Ministry of Agriculture - but it is of particular importance to any study of the evolution of teachers' pressure group activity during the post-war years.

The relationship between 'legitimised' pressure groups and policy makers is often characterised as one of inter-dependency. The pressure groups seek access to the process of decision making in order to protect and advance the interests of those they seek to represent. Access to senior policy makers is seen by them as more cost effective than a conflictual relationship where policies are only influenced through the mobilisation of protest by the pressure group concerned. For the policy maker the relationship can assist in legitimising the eventual policy outcome and

ensure its effective implementation; furthermore the pressure group can often provide considerable expertise and detailed knowledge to assist the process of policy-making.

There can be little doubt that the perceived mutuality of interest between the various branches of the education service reflected the high priority accorded to the education service in the post-war years and its ability to resolve problems without reference to external power relationships. The education service was a matter of consensus between the political parties who shared the general belief in expansion of the service not only because education was perceived to be an undisputed good in itself, but also because it was expected that such investment would contribute towards the health of the economy and the general good. As to the use to which these resources should be put, this did not trouble national politicians overmuch; a commitment to provide additional resources was deemed sufficient - teachers and local authorities were left to determine the means by which these resources might be translated into the desired outcomes. As the service was expanded the co-operation of all parties was required and this no doubt helped to engender in teachers a feeling that their professional status made them partners in a great enterprise, partners whose views were not to be ignored.

In his article on membership participation in the N.U.T., written in 1964 (and only six years before the Union joined the Trades Union Congress) Walter Roy notes that: *"Teachers, with doctors, lawyers, higher civil servants and local government officers, think of themselves as*

belonging to a profession; they see their status as different from that of manual and clerical employees and they regard the NUT as approximating more closely to a professional association than to a trade union."[68] This attitude reflects the confidence of the Union in its ability to influence local and national policy through consultation and professional expertise thus rendering militant action unnecessary in order to secure its objectives. It is an outlook which not only reflects a pluralist view of the policy-making process - that policy outcomes reflect the input of affected interests into that process - but also that in the case of the National Union of Teachers the extent of their influence was perceived to be considerable.

The National Union of Teachers, as the largest teachers' organisation had never eschewed strikes as a means of exerting pressure upon employers but it is true to say that by 1960 there had never been a national stoppage by teachers. By 1969, however, 100,000 teachers were involved in one-day or half-day strike action. Furthermore, by the early 1970's the two largest teacher associations had both affiliated to the Trades Union Congress, the N.U.T. claiming to be no less a professional association for also being a trade union and no less a trade union for also being a professional association!

In placing teachers alongside doctors, lawyers, higher civil servants and local government officers, Walter Roy was emphasising the degree to which teachers felt during the 1950's and early 1960's that they had very considerable influence over the running of the service, as their 'colleagues' had over their respective services. Despite lacking the

degree of self-government enjoyed by doctors and lawyers, the teaching profession had access to, and considerable influence upon, those charged with responsibility for the education service. This influence was reflected in the means employed by education pressure groups in general. and teacher associations in particular, to seek to persuade central government and local authorities to adopt or modify particular policies. Any significant reduction in the degree of influence exerted by the teacher associations is therefore likely to be manifested in a change in the methods adopted by them to influence policy-makers; such a change clearly occurred in the early 1970's.

Ken Jones, a member of the N.U.T. Executive accounts for the Union's traditional reluctance to adopt disruptive and public action to secure its ends by reference to its desire to achieve a large measure of self-government. He says that *"A too-consistent pattern of militancy, political alignment and educational controversy seems from the perspective of professional unity to jeopardise the union's highest ambitions, since the conferral of self-government upon an unruly teaching force would be impossible.*
"In this way the professionalist traditions lock into and reinforce the union's reliance upon the achieving of educational progress, not through combativity or political partisanship, but through alliance with the broadest possible forces on a narrow front of issues."[7]

In the immediate post-war period, and in the wake of the 1944 Education Act, there can be no doubt that there was a widespread belief that education would play a large part in overcoming many of the social and

economic problems which beset the nation between the two world wars, as well as those problems which had been generated by the war. The election in 1945 of a Labour Government committed to expanding the provision of social and welfare services which, it was claimed, would produce greater equity of opportunity as well as greater economic prosperity, led to the education service being widely perceived as the cutting edge for the new society. In these circumstances considerable resources were devoted to the service.

Hargreaves sees the commitment to educational expenditure during this period as being directly linked to the needs of the economy. He observes that *"continuous efforts are made, if not always successfully, to tailor human fortunes and ambitions to the needs of capital. The effect of this upon education in the 1960's was to encourage growing state involvement in and expansion of educational provision in order to produce a technically equipped, socially compliant labour force; and to 'buy' social and political consent by accommodating educational demands."*[8] To the extent that Hargreaves sees educational expenditure as a tool of economic change and growth, it is interesting to reflect that by the time of the Callaghan Government's 'Great Debate' on education, one of the major criticisms of the education service was its failure to contribute effectively towards the economic performance of the nation - simply, it had failed to deliver. Education was not alone in being subjected to such criticism which extended to the public services in general so that it was fashionable by the mid 1970's to argue either that public expenditure was out of control, or that its rapid growth over the past three decades had been a prime cause of Britain's economic

difficulties, or both! However, education was now to pay the price for the high expectations placed upon its ability to produce economic and social benefits both for individuals and for society at large.

Hewton describes the education service at this time as facing a *"loss of confidence as the growth culture came to an end. What was education for? What had it done to improve individuals or society? Was life better in 1974 than it was twenty years earlier despite considerable increases in expenditure? Had any of the innovations provided effective and efficient ways of organising the needs of the service? Were not the traditional ways of doing things perhaps better after all?"*[5]

Criticisms of the level of public expenditure were centred upon the damaging effects upon the economy of diverting employees from productive industries into service industries and of devoting an increasing share of the national wealth to public sector service industries. When the high rates of inflation at the time were also laid at the door of public expenditure the climate for public sector trade unions was bleak. Added to this was the reduction in public confidence in the processes and outcomes of the education service which it was felt in many quarters was a significant contributory factor towards the nation's economic and social problems. In this atmosphere, and in the knowledge that education had fared particularly well in the public expenditure boom, the 'Great Debate' was launched by the Prime Minister in the summer of 1976 at Ruskin College in Oxford. This contributed if not to the widespread criticism of teachers and the education service, at least to the growing

perception on the part of many teachers that they were becoming the scapegoats for the nation's economic plight.

The period of expansion in education in the 1950's and 60's had been marked by the search for continuing consensus through consultations between the Government, powerful pressure groups (particularly the teacher associations) and education authorities. Jennings aptly describes this process when he says:

"In this consensus period, the partnership between the central government and the local authorities in education seemed to flourish. The ease of communication and the several avenues for achieving harmony reinforced the notion of common interest and common action. Confrontation which could have destroyed the harmony was avoided through patient negotiation of issues and next steps. Where aggravations appeared, interest groups aligned with the consensus entered the negotiation to remind their local memberships where the mainstream was and to outline the reasons for remaining within it. The rationale was simple: the central government can compel compliance but has chosen to proceed on the basis of co-operation; if compulsion comes, local authorities and education will be the losers."[10]

By the mid 1970's this consensus was breaking down for various reasons with consequent effects upon pressure group activity. Before examining these modifications to pressure group tactics and strategies it will be helpful to examine the traditional role of these groups, particularly the teacher associations.

As has been stated previously, the traditional means by which groups have sought to influence decision making in educational matters has been through institutionalised access to the decision making process. The Department of Education and Science has always been open to formal contact with pressure groups in order to ascertain views and explain policy, and this has been extended with many 'legitimised' pressure groups to the often far more invaluable informal contacts. These relationships are mirrored in the contacts between local education authorities and certain pressure groups. Both at central and local level the teacher associations, certainly the larger ones, are 'legitimised' by politicians and administrators through their automatic inclusion in the consultative process; to an extent a recognition of the partnership within education and the need to foster a spirit of co-operation among those who must deliver the end product. Certain other pressure groups may be accorded 'legitimised' status from time to time but there is clearly a marked reluctance on the part of those already within the 'secret garden' to open the gate in order to permit the entry of others who might pose a threat to the established consensus.

Such consultations in themselves imply a wish to resolve problems at an early stage in order to avoid open conflict; they indicate a willingness to compromise in order to accommodate the other party, but even more they imply a shared belief that problems can be resolved, or policies determined, by the parties to the discussions, and that a consensus can be established. A belief that issues can be discussed and problems resolved through the consultative process must clearly underpin any such consultative arrangements, yet such arrangements may in themselves

assist the development of consensus based on a recognition of the long term benefits which may result from short term compromise. This close relationship between in particular the 'professionals' as represented by the teachers and the 'administrators' as represented by the civil servants at the Department/Ministry or the education officers of a local authority, has traditionally meant that pressure groups seldom need to resort to a direct appeal to politicians with the consequent politicisation of issues which could prove harmful to the desired consensus. Equally, effective consultation and the creation of consensus within the service renders mass publicity campaigns superfluous.

The limitations of these traditional methods for influencing policy-making began to become apparent in the early 1960's and are demonstrated in two examples of teacher pressure during this period. Throughout the 1950's and early 1960's the teacher associations argued vigorously for the introduction of a shared-cost dependants' pension scheme which would provide pensions for widows and dependants after a teacher's death. Traditional methods of exerting pressure were unsuccessful on this occasion, not because the education service could not reach consensus on this issue but because first the local authorities and then the Government were unwilling to reach agreement with the teachers when this might have ramifications for many other groups of employees. Once it had become apparent that factors external to the education service would prevent the parties from reaching agreement then the teacher associations turned (unsuccessfully as events turned out) to public lobbying in an effort to win support for their cause.'' Ultimately teachers were forced to accept a scheme financed by their own

contributions and administered by the local authorities and the Ministry of Education. In the event, the introduction of a shared-cost scheme was not long delayed but the significance of this campaign was the indication which it gave that the extent to which the educational consensus could meet the needs of its participants was necessarily limited, and that an appeal would need to be made to those outside the 'secret garden' when the occasion demanded. For these purposes the traditional avenues for influencing policy-makers would prove inappropriate, and therefore 'new' lobbying skills and pressure group techniques would require to be adopted.

It was also in the early 1960's that teachers first began to experience the restrictive effects of Government pay pay policies as first Sir David Eccles and then Sir Edward Boyle intervened in salary negotiations by refusing to accept agreements which had been negotiated in the Burnham Committee. This committee was charged with negotiating teachers' salaries but its recommendations could only be put into effect by the Minister of Education who therefore had the power to veto any negotiated settlement. Again it was clear to the teachers that these disputes could not be resolved within the traditional framework of negotiation and consultation since they reflected overall Government policy decisions and therefore provided little opportunity for the education service to resolve these problems internally. The battle was taken to Parliament where Members of Parliament were briefed as to appropriate questions to pose at Question Time; M.P.'s were approached at their local surgeries and lobbied at the House; meetings of M.P.'s were addressed by the General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, and a Parliamentary

motion was sponsored by the N.U.T. For all their effort in this new arena, however, the teachers failed to reverse Government policy or obtain any further concessions for the education service which may well reflect upon the limited nature of the strategy employed to seek to influence the policy-makers, for at this time teachers' self image as professionals tended to preclude the possibility of mounting effective industrial action in support of their case.

In both of these cases the teachers had discovered the essential limitation on their traditional means of influencing policy-making; where decisions have consequences for power relationships in which teachers do not participate then their traditional strategies and tactics are not sufficient to influence the decision-making process. In order for their traditional methods of influencing policy to be effective it was necessary that the Ministry/Department should not be too strongly committed to a policy option in advance and that the preferred policy option should not have implications for Government policy outside the education sector. It was the latter difficulty which the teachers and indeed other pressure groups began to encounter in the 1960's as the autonomy of the Department of Education and Science was reduced in the face of Government economic policy. In the matter of teachers' pensions and salaries there was the problem of the 'knock-on' effect of any favourable treatment for the teachers on any other group of employees. By the mid 1960's the education service was also experiencing other difficulties consequent upon Government economic policy.

In the post-war period the expansion of the public sector was a matter of common agreement between political parties. Between 1955 and 1968 total government expenditure increased as a proportion of the Gross National Product from 36.9% to 52.1%, and within this education also enjoyed an increase from 3.2% of the Gross National Product in 1955 to 5.9% in 1968. During this time education received a greater share of government expenditure than either of the other two big spenders, health and public housing. Education was seen as being of prime importance in the development of the 'opportunity state' and therefore spending on education reflected a positive commitment to the increase in opportunities, if not for the electorate at least for their children.

It is appropriate to characterise the period in question as one within which the public sector increased its share of the nation's resources (at the expense of the private sector) and in which the education service managed to increase its share in comparison with other areas of government expenditure. Within this context it is not difficult to understand why most of the areas of potential conflict could be resolved within the education service and why legitimised pressure groups were somewhat reluctant to 'rock the boat'. Nor was education a politically controversial area; the general view of politicians appears to have been that simply by spending money on the education service standards would improve and the nation's economic prosperity and social harmony be assured.

These might be seen as the classic circumstances for the operation of pluralist politics. Those charged with ultimate responsibility for

policy-making had no strong attachment to any particular set of policy outcomes, nor was education caught up in fierce inter-party rivalry which might preclude or require the adoption of particular policies. Added to this, the availability of substantial additional resources provided an opportunity to meet many of the aspirations of the more significant pressure groups. Thus policy-making may be viewed at this time as the outcome of competing interests of the various groups affected by education decision-making processes.

Throughout most of the 1960's this general pattern obtained but already before 1968 there were signs of problems to come. The Government pay pause in 1961 was imposed upon the education service as well as other sectors; a moratorium on higher education building was imposed in 1965 as one result of the Government's policy decisions in defence of the pound, and the 1968 'nil salary norm' was also imposed for the same reason. In 1968 substantial cuts in public sector spending hit education particularly hard as the Government sought to meet the demands of its international creditors. As education was increasingly brought in to the area of government economic policy-making, so the relative autonomy of the Department of Education and Science was steadily eroded. Coates, in his study of teacher unions [12], points to the impact of Government policy commitments outside the education sector in strengthening the resolve of ministers to resist pressure from the teachers. In particular increasing economic constraints placed limits upon the influence of the traditional forms of teachers' pressure group activity as they came into conflict with power relationships in which teachers did not participate and they therefore needed to evolve new forms of activity in order to

have any influence. These were lessons which would affect not only relations at national level but also the relationship between local education authorities and their teachers.

In the early 1960's education pressure groups began to face the problems of gaining access to centres of government (as distinct from education) decision making and of devising strategies which would succeed in influencing the policy-making process at this level. As has already been noted, the rapid expansion of educational provision was under threat by the early 1960's as a result of the economic problems facing the Government of the day. In order to counter this threat, and so as to meet the demands made by its annual conference for a greater proportion of public expenditure to be devoted to the education service, in 1962 the National Union of Teachers invited more than 50 groups with an interest in education to join it in a campaign for education which was intended to create such a level of demand among the electorate for increased Government expenditure on education that no Government would be able to resist this pressure. There can be no doubt that the timing of this campaign reflected the awareness of an impending general election and was an attempt therefore to take the question of the resources available for education into the political arena. The three main aims for the campaign were to win an increased share of public expenditure, the expansion of higher education and an increase in the supply of trained teachers.

The campaign enjoyed widespread support from a wide range of organisations and concentrated its actions primarily upon the

organisation of public meetings, the maintenance of a high media profile and the production of publicity material. The campaign appears to have succeeded in making education a major issue in the 1964 general election; in terms of resource allocation it is, however, more difficult to argue that the campaign was successful. The campaign was established at a time when the rapid expansion of educational provision in relation to other aspects of public expenditure was coming to an end and it is clear that it did not succeed in re-establishing the trend in favour of educational expenditure. After the campaign the National Plan of the newly elected Labour Government gave to educational expenditure exactly the same growth rate as had the pre-campaign National Economic Development Council's report on 'The Growth of the United Kingdom Economy to 1966'. Relative to other areas of Government expenditure education missed out, but it may be fair to suggest that but for the campaign the move away from educational expenditure, and towards other aspects of social provision, might have been even greater.

By the winter of 1967/68 the education service was faced with further drastic cuts in expenditure as a result of the nation's economic problems. Again education pressure groups found themselves at a distance from the decision-making processes which were having a direct effect upon the service. The teacher associations began to look for alliances with some of those who had assisted in the campaign for education; it would clearly be necessary either to gain access to already existing power relationships or to create new relationships which would bring teachers closer to the central policy-making process.

An indication as to the strategies which would be required is contained in a response in 1966 from the Secretary of State for Education to the General Secretary of the N.U.T. when he said:

"[the point is] how much money he [the Secretary of State for Education] wrings from the Cabinet as compared with his colleagues, the Ministers of Housing, Pensions, Health etc. And when the Cabinet comes to decide these priorities, they do so first of all on merit; but they also, since we live in a democracy, take account of popular desires, and here I must be frank with you.....what have you done to create an irresistible public demand for more educational spending?.....If you ask me for more money you for your part must give me a stronger hand to play with."[13]

It could be argued that Anthony Crosland was somewhat late in drawing attention to the need for pressure groups to take their work beyond the corridors of the education service, but it is significant that the Secretary of State himself should indicate so clearly the inadequacy of the traditional channels for pressure group activity in the world of education in the changing economic circumstances.

The response of the teacher associations to the challenge posed by the erosion of their power to influence policy-making was to seek unity within the profession, take their campaigning to a far wider public, develop increasingly militant forms of action in order to secure their goals, and to explore the possibility of an alliance with groups outside the enclosed world of the education service in order to secure improved

resources for the public sector in general and the education service in particular. As Locke observed:

The successes of the unions in educational policy have depended upon the combination of responsibility and technical information which first is difficult to reconcile with militant action in other spheres and, second, has not succeeded for the unions in pay negotiations. The amount of money available for teachers' salaries came under increasing inspection and control from the Government during the 1960's and early 1970's and thus good relations with the Department of Education and Science were of less importance than impact nationally. Governments appeared to exploit those unions which were respectable and did not push their case to the point of disruption"[14] and;

"....teachers' unions to press their case needed to act upon the Government as a whole. One of the ways they sought to do this was by joining the T.U.C. and another was expressing their feelings and hoping to influence public opinion through strikes, marches and demonstrations."[15]

With the lessening of the significance of the consensus within the service, the traditional reluctance to lobby local education authorities (and primarily their elected representatives rather than the professional administrators) was to disappear and what had once been viewed as a politically neutral area became a fertile field for various interests to promote their views. An indication as to the future direction of pressure group activity within the education service is the increasing importance attached by the teacher associations to professional unity in the 1960's. The National Union of Teachers had

long been a proponent of professional unity but now redoubled its efforts on the basis that as education's share of national resources was already being questioned and with the imposition of government prices and incomes policies, the need for unity in the face of the growing concentration of power in the hands of central government was now imperative. Sir Ronald Gould, then General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said in 1968:

"Unity then is no longer a luxury, it is becoming a necessity, for unity means political power, and disunity political futility."[16]

The various teacher associations all have their origin in breakaways from the National Union of Teachers, and this was bound to cause difficulties in any attempt to unite the profession. As it became increasingly apparent that a merger of all (or indeed any) of the teacher associations would not be achieved, attention was diverted towards the goal of professional self-government, a more introspective but ultimately no more successful objective. Significantly, during discussions on the possible formation of a General Teaching Council spokespersons for the Department of Education and Science as well as the local authorities repeatedly stressed that the teaching profession would have to choose between militancy and self-government.[17] Since self-government was not likely to include the power to determine the level of resources which would be made available to the education service this was not viewed by the teacher associations as a realistic choice. That the choice was presented to the teachers indicates, however, the awareness of, and concern about, increasing militancy and public campaigning on the part of the teacher associations.

According to Coates the relative ineffectiveness of the teacher associations in the 1960's reflected their failure to adjust to the new situation in which they found themselves. *"Lack of sanctions," he said rather than lack of channels of access, explains the low impact of the teachers' associations through the traditional forms of pressure in the 1960's."*[18] As has been indicated previously the new strategies adopted by the teacher associations tended to be based upon lobbying activities; at this time however there was abundant evidence outside the education service that pressure groups which used industrial action in order to influence decisions on resource allocation were proving to be far more successful in achieving their objectives.

A decade which had begun with teachers never having been involved in a national stoppage was to end with widespread strike action by teachers as they began to learn the lessons of the new pressure politics. The first signs of increasing teacher militancy came with the Burnham salaries' agreement in 1961 which was first rejected by the teachers and then, following the imposition of a government pay pause, became the target of a campaign by teachers to secure its implementation. An indication as to the reluctance of teachers to resort to strike action at this stage is given by the conduct of the N.U.T. at the time. It should be mentioned, however, that the National Association of Schoolmasters, a 'men only' union with a reputation for militancy in those days, took limited strike action during 1961 culminating in a strike on 20 September involving 20,000 members and managed as a result to secure representation on the Burnham Committee, something which their more traditional forms of pressure had not achieved.

The N.U.T. rejected the 1961 provisional Burnham settlement and a divided national Executive voted (by a majority of one) to recommend to a special conference of the Union a token one day strike to be followed by local strikes of longer duration. Amidst some confusion this policy was adopted by the special conference only to be overtaken by events as the Government's 'pay pause' precluded implementation of the agreement anyway. The response of the N.U.T. Executive was to demand that the agreement be implemented, but the Executive was badly divided over the means to be adopted in order to influence the Government in this matter. By late August the Union had agreed with the other teacher associations that it would be better to concentrate upon political action and to avoid strike action in the circumstances. By early September this had changed once again to recommending strike action, only for the Union's policy to be amended yet again to a recommendation that members should resign their posts but seek permission to continue to teach their classes! In a referendum which the Union subsequently held approximately 60% of members voted in favour of some form of strike action but the Executive felt that this was insufficient to justify the Union embarking upon such action. Nevertheless, another special conference of the Union was held on 7 October and this voted in favour of a one-day national strike, only for the Executive to abandon plans for a strike in return for the Government's promise to postpone their planned reform of the Burnham Committee (allowing the N.A.S. to join); a matter which was dear to the Union's heart but hardly the central issue of the matter in dispute.

It is readily apparent from even the most cursory glance at the circumstances surrounding the 1961 dispute that the leadership of the majority of the profession (and at that time this meant the N.U.T.) was displaying a marked reluctance to forego the professional's image as responsible and persuasive rather than militant and antagonistic. Even in the face of evidently quite widespread support amongst members for more militant action to secure implementation of the salary agreement, the Executive of the National Union of Teachers apparently felt that its traditional channels for influencing policy would be more effective than strike action. The dispute ended with no strike action and no pay increase.

By 1967, the next occasion upon which teachers were to challenge government pay policy (on this occasion a pay 'norm'), there was markedly less reluctance to embark upon disruptive action. When negotiations became deadlocked and the 1967 salary award was referred to arbitration against the wishes of the N.U.T., the Union decided to withdraw its members from the supervision of school meals, refuse to work alongside unqualified teachers, and to retain the option of organising regional strikes. The former two sanctions represented long standing Union policies in opposition to compulsory lunchtime supervision of pupils and the continuing employment of unqualified teachers; indeed some members of the profession might have felt these to be more important issues than the more immediate question of the salary claim. When members were balloted for action in selected areas the response was a strong vote in favour of action along the lines suggested by the Executive. However it was on the questions of lunchtime

supervision and unqualified teachers that the Union's action was ultimately successful; lunchtime supervision became a voluntary activity and significant moves were made towards an all qualified profession. Clearly neither issue had serious implications beyond the education service - in terms of their salary objectives the campaign could only be seen as a failure.

The next major dispute over teachers' pay followed upon the 1969 salary award with the teachers seeking an interim award mid-way through the term of their two-year agreement. When the employers refused to agree to an interim award the teacher unions displayed a remarkable unity of purpose in their campaign to alter this decision. Mass rallies and protests were held throughout the country and 7,000 teachers in London took part in a half-day strike and march through the city. These protests succeeded in producing an offer of a £50 per annum flat rate increase in response to the unions' claim for a £135 increase. Further strike action followed and even the normally docile 'Joint Four' unions declared their support for action. By December 1969 100,000 teachers had taken part in strike action.

By the time a further offer was made (£100 to all teachers earning less than £1000 per annum falling on a sliding scale to £60 for those earning in excess of £1525 per annum) the Government had announced a new pay 'norm'. In rejecting the new offer the teachers pointed to various groups who had used strike action, or the threat of strike action, to achieve higher pay settlements than were on offer to the teachers. Airline pilots had achieved a 15% pay increase within three weeks of the

Burnham settlement for teachers, dustmen a 16% increase, firemen a 12% increase and miners a 10% increase. The message to teachers was clear and a further improvement upon the employers' offer was rejected early in 1970. With several thousand teachers involved in limited strike action during January the N.U.T. sought to ballot members on prolonged strike action and the response was overwhelming with 80% of those balloted voting in favour. The National Association of Schoolmasters and the Assistant Masters' Association also took strike action. In early March agreement was reached with an increase for all teachers of £120 per annum and a commitment to a full Burnham agreement to be negotiated for implementation by 1 January 1971.

What is clear from these examples is that the 1960's represented a period of transition for teachers' pressure group activity. In 1961 only 37% of N.U.T. members were prepared to support a levy in order to sustain strike action and a clear 40% were not prepared to support strike action even to secure implementation of a salary agreement which had been reached with their employers. By 1970 even teachers in the traditionally 'moderate' teacher associations could see the value of strike action as a weapon. In a referendum held in 1970 by the Assistant Masters' Association 66% of their members voted for strike action, as did 50% of the membership of the Assistant Mistresses' Association, in support of their 1971 salary claim.

It would be incorrect, however, to imply that the increased militancy of the teacher associations had achieved great success. The most clear cut victories were over issues which had no significance for other groups of

employees or areas of government policy; membership of the Burnham Committee, unqualified teachers and lunchtime supervision were no doubt dear to the heart of many a teacher but these were issues which could be resolved within the education service and which had no implications for government policy in other spheres. On the question of teachers' salaries, an area of increasing conflict as a result of government economic policy, the teachers had only one major success during this period and this came in 1970 when determined and effective strike action brought a favourable settlement in the form of an interim award. It has been suggested that 1970 presented a unique combination of circumstances in so far as the Government's pay policy had already been widely broken, a general election was imminent, and an unexpected balance of payments' surplus had been achieved. Be that as it may, the lesson which teachers took into the 1970's was that simply establishing a consensus within the closed world of the education service was no longer sufficient to ensure that pressure groups could achieve their objectives; pressure group activity had now to move into the political forum of public pressure through lobbying, marching, striking and disruption if objectives were to be achieved. The erosion of the relative autonomy of the education service also brought the various pressure groups into closer alliance with each other and with groups outside the education sector in order to influence Government policy in the direction of favourable consideration for the needs of the service.

It had become clear to the teacher associations early in the 1960's that Government decision making on national economic policy was having a fundamental impact upon the education service and the interests of the

teaching profession, yet the associations had no access to, nor influence over, these decisions. As a response to the Government's pay pause of July 1961 the teacher associations took the lead in establishing the Conference of Professional and Public Service Organisations (COPPSO) which first met in August 1961. The conference was attended by representatives from the various teacher associations, local government employees, civil servants and health workers, and attracted observers from other organisations. By the Spring of 1962 COPPSO could claim to speak for 700,000 public sector and white collar employees who at that time were reluctant to join the predominantly blue collar Trades Union Congress. Although it claimed not to be a rival to the T.U.C., the Secretary of COPPSO, Ronald Gould (General Secretary of the N.U.T.) explained its existence by saying that without such a body as COPPSO *"the spoils would go to those who were industrially strong; self-evidently, professional workers do not have that kind of strength."*[19]

Essential to the success of COPPSO was that it should gain access to the decision making process on national economic policy, primarily through the National Economic Development Council. When representation on the NEDC was denied to COPPSO then its raison d'etre disappeared, followed quickly by the organisation itself. The last meeting of COPPSO was held in February 1965 after which, in recognition of the realities of economic and political life, many of the constituent organisations began the process of overcoming their reluctance to join the T.U.C.; indeed the teacher associations themselves were not long in giving serious consideration to this step.

The National Association of Local Government Officers affiliated to the T.U.C. as early as 1964 and thereby played a large part in helping to modify the image of the T.U.C. as an almost exclusively blue collar organisation. However the teachers required a little more persuasion yet. The first teachers' association to affiliate to the T.U.C. was the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions whose membership would appear to have been in advance of the leadership by voting at the annual conference, and subsequently in a special conference, in 1966 for the Association to affiliate to the T.U.C. from 1 January 1967. The leaderships of the N.U.T. and the N.A.S., the two largest teacher associations, both moved from a policy of opposition to T.U.C. affiliation as late as 1966 to one of support for affiliation by 1967. The N.A.S. joined in November 1968 and the N.U.T. balloted its members in October 1968 on the question of affiliation to the T.U.C.. Despite a rejection by the membership (by a ratio of 4:3) of affiliation, the 1970 annual conference of the Union voted for affiliation and the N.U.T. therefore joined the T.U.C. in May 1970. As yet the other teacher associations have not affiliated to the T.U.C..

In describing the affiliation of the white collar unions to the T.U.C. in their book 'The Rebellious Salariat' Jenkins and Sherman attribute this development to dissatisfaction with Government economic policy. They say that *"These newcomers are the dissatisfied groups carrying the scars of six post-war governmental incomes policies and questioning the status quo."*[20] Given the marked reluctance of these unions, and the teacher unions in particular, to enter into the political work of the trade union movement it is clear that there are bounds beyond which

their questioning of the status quo will not as yet reach. Jenkins and Sherman place great store by the 1961 'pay pause' in developing a more trade union outlook amongst this group of employees, noting that following this *"the starched white collars started to assert themselves"*[21], but the reaction of the 'professionals' in establishing a rival organisation to the T.U.C. indicates a marked reluctance by these groups to join with their blue collar colleagues. Nevertheless, it would certainly seem that Government imposed incomes policy acted as a spur to these groups which, when they were denied parity of status with the T.U.C. in determining Government economic policy, ultimately forced them into alliance with the manual unions.

It is clear that the 1960's was a decade which witnessed a dramatic change in the pattern of pressure group activity by the teacher associations. At the same time it also witnessed a rapid expansion of promotional pressure group activity in the world of education. Parent/teacher associations were revitalised; the Advisory Centre for Education (an educational consumers' association) was formed in 1960; the National Association of Governors and Managers was established in 1970; the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education set out in 1962 to co-ordinate the activities of local parental pressure groups; the National Campaign for Nursery Education was established in the mid 1960's as was the National Association for Multicultural Education; the Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment was yet another of the many pressure groups which emerged during this period. These groups, without access to the decision-making process which the legitimised sectional interest groups had established, were obliged to seek to

influence policy-making through public activity; their greatest weapon was not their essential role in the education service but the political consequences for those who might choose to ignore them. The extent to which the teacher associations came to emulate the strategies of these promotional pressure groups is indicative of their growing sense of alienation from the heart of the decision-making process. The promotional groups, too, were reflecting a belief that the walls of the 'secret garden' had been breached and that they were no longer excluded from policy-making by the educational consensus.

The teacher associations were not only forced to campaign more vigorously in order to ensure that education received an adequate share of Government expenditure, but also to campaign more vigorously for their priorities in resource allocation within the service in the face of increased competition for resources from promotional pressure groups. According to Christopher Price *"Once the idea of participation had taken hold, the walls of the secret garden, guarded so assiduously over the years by the teachers and local authorities progressively began to collapse."*[22] In addition to the threat from parental demands for increased participation in the work of the education service, teachers felt threatened by the disciples of corporate management in the local authorities and from central government's wish to increase political control over the work of the nation's schools. The creation of the Assessment of Performance Unit, the launch of the so-called 'Great Debate' on educational standards by the Prime Minister in 1976, a steady flow of DES circulars and HMI publications about the need to monitor

performance and to establish the core essentials of the curriculum, all indicated a changed environment for the teacher associations.

Thus, by the mid-1970's the teacher associations had been forced by changing circumstances to adopt new strategies and tactics in order to achieve their objectives. The decline of the autonomy of the Department of Education and Science and the local authorities in the face of Government economic policy, and in particular the declining share of public expenditure on education, led the teachers to transfer their attention to the wider political arena in order to ensure a favourable allocation of resources for the service. In his Presidential address to the 1973 Annual Conference of the National Union of Teachers Max Morris foresaw a difficult time ahead for the teaching profession: *"I am issuing a warning that the complacency with which many of our political masters treat education will boomerang with a terrible vengeance on all our futures....The mid-seventies will be for teachers a seething cauldron of stress and struggle."*[23]

There was, too, no longer a clear distinction between the activity of the major teacher associations and that of other groups of organised workers; denied the privileged position of an automatic expansion of the service, teachers were obliged to re-assess their tactics and lessons were learnt from those who had been forced to fight in the wider arena in years past. That teachers were reluctant to learn this lesson can be seen by their equivocal attitude towards strike action and their hopes for a 'professional' alternative to the Trades Union Congress, but by the 1970's a substantial proportion of the profession had indicated by

their actions that militancy rather than self-government presented the most effective means of protecting their interests.

Kogan clearly places the development of teacher 'militancy' in a national context: *"These demands"* he says *"from a hitherto underpaid and respectable profession were, then, part of the unionisation and politicisation of the education service. As such, the teachers responded to the general mood. Government had hitherto referred to a 'partnership' between central and local government, and the teachers. This rhetoric now weakened".*[24] The Government's plans for public expenditure which were announced early in 1976 took a further £1 billion off earlier plans, and the White Paper in late 1976 took off around £1½ billion. Given these developments it was perhaps predictable that the teacher associations would respond to further cuts in the level of educational expenditure by taking industrial action. This was to be put to the test in Oxfordshire in 1976.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION, POLICY MAKING AND THE EDUCATION SERVICE

Reform of the local government system

The Oxfordshire dispute arose shortly after the long awaited reform of the local government structure had been effected. These reforms were fundamental, reflecting as they did a dissatisfaction with the financing of local government, with the allocation of areas of responsibility to local authorities, with the internal structure of local authorities and with the boundaries of the various units of local government. The Layfield, Maud, Redcliffe-Maud and Bains reports were the results of a period of close scrutiny for the local government system in England and Wales, and their recommendations were to have a major effect upon the provision of local authority services, not least the education service.

Prior to the reorganisation of local government in 1974 the major services falling within the remit of local authorities (including the education service) were provided by 124 'first-tier' authorities; county boroughs based upon urban conurbations and counties covering the rural areas. When the original Local Government Bill was presented in 1888 it proposed that there should be only ten county boroughs, all of which had a population in excess of 150,000. By 1974 this figure had grown to 79. Although they were unitary authorities and therefore responsible for all services, these county boroughs varied in population size from 1,074,940 to 32,790, in many cases serving a smaller population than the 'second-tier' authorities which had responsibility for far fewer services.

The 1902 Education Act, which abolished the School Boards, had made county borough councils and county councils responsible for primary and secondary education irrespective of the populations served by these authorities. The provision of education was one of, if not the primary function of these authorities, and service on the education committee was greatly prized by councillors. Education committees tended to contain long-established councillors who often came to view the work of the education committee almost as unrelated to the other activities of the local authority.

During the period up until local government reorganisation a strong independent education lobby had developed in the Association of Education Committees which, in the words of Christopher Price, aimed to *"keep alive the spirit of the nineteenth century school boards, and organise a cadre of aldermen and councillors who were committed to promoting education rather than holding down the rates; an association of education committees rather than education authorities."*[1] There can be no doubt that as by far the most expensive local government service the education committee dominated local government activity, more especially so in relatively small county boroughs. Certainly the AEC was an important partner in the unspoken consensus between the teacher associations and the providers of education in the form of the Ministry and the local authorities.

By the early 1960s the structure of local government, which largely reflected demographic patterns and methods of service delivery of the previous century, was coming under close scrutiny from those who saw a

need to revise the geographical boundaries and the allocation of responsibilities within local government. Pressure for local government reform finally came to a head and resulted in the Committee on the Management of Local Government (the Maud Committee) which was appointed in 1964 and reported in 1967; the Royal Commission on Local Government in England (the Redcliffe-Maude Commission) which was appointed in 1966 and reported in 1969, and the Report on Management and Structure for the new Local Authorities (the Bains Report) which was published in 1972.

The Redcliffe-Maud Commission highlighted the major faults in the structure of local government, notably the problem of the separation of town and country under separate authorities with consequent problems for planning, and the disparities in the size and revenue of local authorities. The Commission recommended the unitary authority as the basic pattern for local government, based upon a minimum population of 250,000. In the event, the Government chose not to accept the recommendations of the Commission and decided to establish a two tier system across the country with major services such as education being administered by the first-tier authorities. The city of Oxford, for example, was to lose responsibility for education which passed to Oxfordshire County Council.

Although the changing pattern of local government was to have an impact upon the education service it was equally significant that the internal structure of local authorities was also coming under closer scrutiny, most noticeably through the Maud and Bains Reports. It should not be forgotten that the Government in the late 1960's was eager to draw

attention to the technological revolution which was to provide the basis for Britain's future economic prosperity. Industry was exhorted to streamline and invest in new technology in order to improve competitiveness, and through planning and the more efficient use of resources the economy was to be revitalised. Inevitably this approach came also to be adopted with regard to the provision of local government services.

"The 1960's in Britain was the decade of rationalisation - the Ministry of Technology was formed to help industry to reorganise itself to face the modern world, the Department of Economic Affairs to help us plan the country's future; health and social security were brought together. Management consultants abounded, preaching new styles of management, new tools of management. Efficiency was the catchword. It was not a world into which local government with its cosy and fusty image could be readily fitted. Change had become inevitable."[2]

An important aspect of the proposed reform was the belief that the larger local authorities thus created, with significantly increased resources, once having taken on board the new management structures and decision-making processes would attract professional staff of higher quality than before. It was also intended that the creation of fewer and larger authorities would be accompanied by a reduction in the amount of central control and direction and a consequent strengthening of local autonomy; they would therefore require to operate in an efficient, effective and business-like manner.

The Maude Committee Report on the Management of Local Government had identified the major problems of local government administration as being departmentalism and disunity. This, the Committee felt, resulted from the traditional approach within local government of appointing heads of the various departments, each of equal status, with a clerk to co-ordinate their work who was of equal status with other departmental chiefs. Since a council's committee structure tended to match its departmental structure this served to reinforce the relationship between the chairman of the appropriate committee and the chief officer of each service, thus reinforcing the tendency for them to run their service independently of the council as a whole. Local authorities were described as having *"separate parts, in each of which is gathered the individual service, with its professional departmental heirarchy led by a principal officer, and supervising it, a committee of members. There might be unity in the parts, but there is disunity in the whole"*[3] said the Maude Committee.

Corporate Management

The existing structure of local goverment was considered to encourage an incrementalist approach amongst administrators and politicians alike. The underlying assumption of the decision-making process was that existing activities must be continued and that the primary responsibility of local government must be to determine which activities should grow and which not. Education, as the major spending service within local government and providing a service which will have a direct bearing upon a large proportion of the population as pupils, parents or

potential parents at any given point in time, clearly enjoyed an influential position in a fragmented system of local government. The Association of Education Committees helped to perpetuate the image of a semi-autonomous system of educational administration through local education authorities. The Maud recommendations and those from the Bains Committee served to remind education committees that local education authorities were no more than local authorities which had responsibility, inter alia, for the provision of education. This was not to prove an easy transition for the education service which, according to Jennings[4] *"appeared to have the greatest difficulty in accommodating to the changes in structures, processes and power relationships."*

Without an officer to take overall responsibility for the local authority's work each head of department would work in relative isolation from his/her colleagues, concentrating upon the objectives and problems of their particular service. This situation made it extremely difficult to lay down an overall strategy for the authority and so was thought to hinder efficiency. Maud recommended that one officer, normally the Clerk, should be appointed as the undisputed head of staff who would be responsible for overall strategy. This approach had, in fact, already been adopted by certain councils who had 'imported' business executives in order to fulfil this role and to streamline the administrative process, not least by reducing the number of departments - another of the Maud Committee recommendations. Upon the reorganisation of local government in 1974 these recommendations were almost universally adopted. Perhaps surprisingly, in all but a handful of cases, local authorities appeared to regard a legal qualification as a

prerequisite for the post of chief executive, although Oxfordshire and a few other authorities preferred to appoint former local government treasurers.

The Bains Report was in broad agreement with the Maude Committee on the need to apply management philosophies and techniques from other fields to the process of local government. It emphasised the importance of corporate management and management by objectives, much beloved in industry at the time, as well as the use of modern methods of programme planning and budgeting systems. In essence the Report set out to replace the fragmented, departmental approach with a more centralised approach founded upon the overall strategy of the authority, to provide the means of centralising and co-ordinating the policy subsystems which, in effect, the various committees and their departments formed. Bains endorsed Maud's recommendation with regard to a head of staff, or Chief Executive, and advocated the formation of a small management team of Chief Officers who would co-ordinate advice on forward planning of objectives and ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the authority's programme and policies. Alongside this management team was to be the key council committee, the policy and resources committee, which was not intended to represent a collection of partial (departmental) interests but to act as the primary instrument for ensuring that the strategic objectives of the authority were to be achieved and that all departments and committees should play their part in securing these objectives.

Education, too, would be expected to participate in the tidewash of management theory which would have the effect of subjecting the decisions of professionals to the tests of priorities, costs and programming of the local authority as a whole. Traditionally, education had come to be regarded by many as a semi-autonomous service which was subject to relatively few checks within the local government structure. Corporate management techniques would tend towards fragmentation of educational interests and the undermining of informal interactions as the focus of power shifted away from the education committee and officers towards the policy and resources committee. This would serve to increase the pressure on education committees and chief education officers to surrender at least some of their traditional autonomy in the name of greater efficiency.

Wallace, Miller and Ginsberg[5] identify three sets of relationships in the education sector which were influenced by these changes and the changed economic climate:

i) the relationship between the education service and other administrative concerns with financial constraints on local authorities elevated to such a position that financial interests became overtly dominant (it is perhaps unfortunate that the reform of the local government system coincided with a period of extreme financial stringency which, of necessity, heightened the need for policies which called for negative controls on spending);

ii) between teachers and personnel administering the system as increasingly heirarchical and bureaucratic relations undermined the personal networks which had traditionally underpinned decisions; and

iii) the formalisation of the traditional consultative relationship between the local education authority and the teacher associations.

The recommendations of the Bains Report embodied a significant departure from the practice of many authorities and were not without their critics. Many councillors saw the policy and resources committee as a threat to their traditional autonomy within their service committees; they feared that they would simply become the administrators of their services with all the policy making taken away from them and placed in the hands of the select few on the policy and resources committee. Education Committee chairmen and members had particular cause for concern as the largest spending committee, traditionally enjoying considerable autonomy. Olive Gibbs, the Leader of Oxford City Council and Chairwoman of the City's Education Committee before reorganisation expressed considerable anxiety over the reforms when she said *"I am terrified of management structures in local government. I don't like to think of councils being run by business techniques."*[=]

The introduction of these new corporate management techniques may have been expected to cause a degree of dislocation within the education service as people sought to adjust to the new realities. A cause celebre at the time was that of the Director of Education for Avon who resigned his post as a result of the effects of corporate management on educational administration within the County. In his letter of resignation, Derek Williams wrote, in 1976 *"I do not and cannot exercise the responsibilities the Education Committee and your schools and*

colleges expect of me and my departmental staff. The management of the education service is fragmented between so many committees and administrative departments of the council that there is no united or effective direction of it."[7] His cause was taken up by the Society of Education Officers which advised its members not to apply for the vacant position in Avon until the Authority produced a job description for the post which it could accept. Eventually, the Society claimed that it had been given an assurance that the Chief Education Officer would be given a free hand to reorganise the department. although publicly they would only say that *"When making the appointment, the education committee will fully explore with candidates its present form of corporate management and its possible development."*[8] The President of the Society of Education Officers, Roy Harding, was possibly addressing a wider audience when he wrote to the Chief Executive for Avon saying *"I am sure that we all hope that the new arrangements will lead to a greater awareness of the problems and possibilities for all concerned and that it may, in consequence, be possible to appoint to Avon a chief education officer, who will have the confidence not only of the authority and the Society of Education Officers, but also all the others who are concerned with the education service in Avon."*[9]

The education service viewed with great scepticism the proposed reforms fearing that these would effectively downgrade education to 'just another service'; would increasingly centralise the authority's decision making process in the hands of the Chief Executive, Treasurer and leading members of the ruling political group, with the Chief Education Officer effectively excluded from this inner cabal; would lead to

decisions being made by those who were not sensitive to the management problems of the education service; and that they would lead to a reduction in financial support as those outside the service saw falling school rolls as an excuse for indiscriminate cutting without reference to the Education Department. Nevertheless this approach was adopted by the overwhelming majority of councils following local government reorganisation.

That the recommendations of the Bains Report were so widely adopted reflects both the evangelical flavour of the Report which chimed with the objective of efficiency, and the commitment of the Secretary of State for the Environment to the recommendations. Management change was seen as inseparable from, and indeed as a constituent part of, the process of reform and reorganisation. It is apparent that many Chief Officers still regarded departmentalism as the great bulwark in defence of their services and none more so than Chief Education Officers; however the focus of decision has moved from the committees of the council, and the council itself, to the policy and resources committee and indeed to the party group meeting. As Howard Elcock says in his book 'Local Government': *"..corporate management legitimises leadership and heirarchy, strengthening in particular the power of leading members of the council at the expense of the back-benchers."*[10] Clearly the committee which stood to lose most influence as a result of this development was the education committee which still dominated local authority expenditure and had traditionally operated as a semi-autonomous service; now education officers and education committee

members would have to adjust to new power relationships in which their contribution might be marginalised.

According to Jennings'' *"From what education professionals and their friends had seen in the early days of reorganisation and reform, it was clear to them that the changes taking place were particularly detrimental to the political power of the service at the local level. They shared the doubts of other services about some changes, especially in the management system. But beyond that, it appeared that education had been singled out for severe treatment."* Whether the education service was troubled more by corporate management itself or by the increasing centralisation of decision making, which in many local authorities seems to have passed for corporate management, must be open to question. If corporate management was to mean the ordering of political priorities between services as well as within services then it is arguable that education might have been successful in obtaining a substantial share of the authority's resources. Instead, corporate management appeared to represent simply a method of determining centrally the resources available to the service, with little reference to the needs of the service or relative priorities between services.

One must not, of course, forget that in the early days of the new structure elected members and chief executives were adjusting to the new power relationships. Nevertheless, in a time of financial stringency the education service felt that it had every reason to fear developments which might undermine its relatively autonomous position.

Local Government Finance

A more intractable problem was the question of local government finance. In 1974 the Government established the Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Finance (the Layfield Committee) partly in response to the large rate increases throughout the country in 1974 and partly to look for long-term improvements in the system of local government finance. What the Committee found was *"a collection of financial arrangements whose objectives were not clear and which had never been properly related to each other."*[12] The Committee made many technical recommendations regarding local government finance but the main issue which it raised was that of the fundamental relationship between local and national government. Observing a drift towards central control of local government expenditure, the Committee was not as concerned with the respective merits of close government control or local autonomy as with encouraging the politicians to decide between these two options so that effective strategies might be adopted in order to secure these ends.

Traditionally, local authorities have been given statutory responsibilities with regard to education but have lacked the financial infrastructure to complement these responsibilities; the consequent reliance by local authorities upon Government grants for the bulk of their resources is often viewed by central government as a desirable and necessary component in the consultation, negotiation, bargaining, and sometimes conflict which characterises central-local relations.

In the early years following the 1944 Education Act, education was funded by percentage grants through which the Government would finance educational provision on the basis of a capitation grant for each full-time pupil and a payment of a percentage of authorised expenditure less the product of a 12½p rate. The percentage grant system had much support from the education service which saw it as a means of ensuring sufficient funds for the service and of avoiding 'poaching' of education funds by other services; however others argued that the system led to excessive Government control of local authority services, and that the system made it difficult for central government to formulate plans for future expenditure since it was to an extent dependent upon the expenditure plans of individual local authorities.

When, during the late 1950s, the Government formed the view that percentage grants should, in the main, be abolished and replaced by block grants the teacher associations and the Association of Education Committees joined in opposition to the proposal. Their suspicions were summed up by the General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers who felt that *"some representatives of local government were in favour of the Government's proposals because they enabled them to exert even more control over their education departments. Town and county clerks wanted more control over chief education officers, party leaders over education committees."*[18] His views were to be echoed later by those opposed to the reform of the local government system in the mid 1970s - but on each occasion without success.

It is particularly interesting to note that at the time when the percentage grant was to be replaced, the Association of Education Committees felt able to express a view distinct from that of the local authorities themselves, of which they were a component part. This in itself illustrates the strength of the educational consensus which could form a common view almost in isolation from the wider central or local government context. With the disappearance of the Association of Education Committees following local government reorganisation in 1974 the independent voice, distinct from the views of the local authorities as such, was lost. The Council of Local Education Authorities has never sought to achieve that degree of independence and the education service has subsequently been represented locally by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Association of County Councils which have themselves often been divided along party political lines and hence less effective as representatives of local authority services.

In 1967 the Government introduced the Rate Support Grant system for providing central government finance to local authorities. Based upon an exceedingly, and increasingly, complicated set of calculations involving a domestic element based upon demographic and environmental factors, and a resources element to assist poorer areas. As far as the education service was concerned, it had to fend for itself within the local authority policy-making process in order to seek to obtain the necessary funding for its needs in direct competition with all other services and with the politicians' desire to avoid undue rate increases.

There exists in local government, and in the education service in particular, an elaborate structure for consultation between the providers of the service and the interest groups representing those who are employed within the service. As well as having consultative committees upon which the various teacher associations are represented there is the possibility of direct discussion between any individual teacher association and the education authority. In addition the teacher representatives who occupy the reserved places upon local authority education committees are normally leading representatives of one or more of the teacher associations. Throughout the policy-making process then, the teachers at least should have an opportunity to influence the decisions which are taken. However, as the educationalists found themselves competing against all other local government services for increasingly scarce resources there developed a perception that the teacher associations had become more concerned to secure resources for their members rather than for the service itself. Although the unions claimed that there was no conflict of interest between the needs of their members and the service itself, the increasing trade union orientation of what were once seen as professional bodies led to greater scepticism on the part of councillors and education officers. Nevertheless, teachers continued to enjoy a privileged position in the policy-making process - albeit with reduced influence - but they were to be required to use that influence in order to seek to secure a larger share of the local authority's resources for the education service; previously their emphasis had been more upon the distribution of resources within the service.

During the 1950s, and for much of the 1960s, education had attracted an increasing share of public expenditure and therefore the service had developed a considerable degree of autonomy in policy-making. As the service began to experience difficulty in securing the desired level of resource allocation it became necessary for teachers to re-evaluate their position within the policy-making process.

Jennings[14], in his assessment of the policy-making process, points to six stages in the formulation of policy:

(i) initiation of policy when dissatisfaction is first expressed with the status quo;

(ii) reformulation of opinion when opinions are crystallised and a range of policy options tested;

(iii) the emergence of alternatives when potential solutions to problems are put forward;

(iv) discussion and debate where policy proposals are shaped to produce concrete proposals;

(v) legitimisation when the policy is ratified and legislated; and

(vi) implementation of the policy.

Few would disagree that this represents a most desirable progression from dissatisfaction to resolution of the problem, and indeed with many policy decisions which are internal to the education service these steps can all be identified. The problem experienced in recent years has however been that crucial decisions, which often condition the policy-making process, are on many occasions taken before being considered by

the consultative processes within the education sector. The parameters within which the education committee must operate have been more sharply defined and its freedom of manoevre restricted; as a result the teachers have discovered that their elaborate consultative machinery often fails to provide them with the degree of influence which they would wish for.

The relative autonomy previously enjoyed by the education service came to be increasingly under challenge as the nation's economic difficulties further increased the degree of competition for scarce resources. As Greenwood et al. noted in 1977 *"present circumstances of a diminishing economic product, however, have sharpened the choices that have to be made between competing claims. Actors in the budgetary process are probably more aware, in 1976, of the central importance of the budget than was the case ten years earlier."*[15]

The Layfield Committee proposed the maxim that whoever is responsible for spending money should also be responsible for raising it so that the amount of expenditure is subject to democratic control. Local government cannot, however, raise sufficient income in order to provide the services required of it and central government must of necessity exercise some control over local government expenditure if it is to achieve its national economic objectives. Local authorities are responsible for determining the level of provision of any particular service although the Government may encourage authorities to increase spending in a particular direction. Layfield advocated that a clear decision should be made between acceptance by central government of responsibility for local government expenditure or, alternatively,

permitting local government to raise a far greater proportion of its income (through a local income tax, for example) in order that it might be held more accountable for its policy decisions. Such decisions are made more easily during periods of relative economic prosperity than during the difficult economic period of the 1970's. With the economy facing severe problems at the time of the reform of the local government system the Government was not inclined to permit local authorities greater freedom in determining the level of their expenditure; the Government's priority was indeed to reduce that expenditure!

In a case study of the Berkshire County Council's education policy-making process'[6] four essential aspects of this process were identified:

a) the central role of the budgetary process in determining future policy;

b) the extent of the impact of corporate management techniques in deciding priorities;

c) the extent to which the determination of the budget is a political process; and

d) the extent to which the local authority is inhibited by statutory constraints when determining budget allocation.

The importance of the budgetary process cannot be over-emphasised when considering policy decisions of a local authority. Much local government expenditure is on-going and so simply to continue to provide a particular level of service will often require increased expenditure; even after a change in political control of an authority much of the expenditure will already be committed and the scope for new policy

initiatives therefore somewhat limited. During a period when reductions in local authority expenditure are required policy-making becomes more a question of identifying areas within which savings can be made and areas which are to be protected from expenditure cuts. An indication as to the problems experienced in this respect comes again from the Berkshire case study:

"There was, however, an air of fatigue hanging over the whole education budget process by the time 1981 had been reached. For at least three successive years officers and councillors had combed the estimates for areas where cuts could be made without directly affecting the educational process between teacher and pupil. Many of them were well aware that the cuts they were implementing did have an effect, direct or indirect, on the quality of the service. The majority of the Education Committee members did not wholly subscribe to the cost-effective approach to education, however much they approved the intention behind central government's expenditure controls."[17]

The introduction of corporate management techniques into local government came largely to be seen as a means of restricting the level of resources available to each service. Rather than assessing the relative value of specific provision within each service in order to prioritise with regard to resource allocation, policy and resources committees were seen simply as central committees determining the overall reduction in the resources available to each service. Thus, education committees came to see themselves more as administrators of a

reduced and reducing level of service than as decision-makers for the most important of local government services.

In 1975 a new Rate Support Grant formula was introduced which sought to determine the amount which a local authority should spend on its various services. If the annual total amount specified by the Department of the Environment was exceeded then the authority would incur penalties in respect of its succeeding allocation. With education spending accounting for some two-thirds of their expenditure, the 'first-tier' local authorities were subjected to unprecedented constraints as the resources available for all their services were reduced. In their study of the budgetary process within local authorities at this time, Greenwood et al. identified four stages:

(i) Demand i.e. the departmental estimates of their expenditure needs for the coming financial year;

(ii) Supply i.e. the ceiling which the authority must place upon the level of its expenditure;

(iii) Appropriation i.e. determining priorities between departments; and

(iv) Matching of the various 'bids' with the available resources.

They observed that *"in particular the financial restrictions of the mid-1970s have brought with them a tendency to reverse the first two stages; to estimate resources and inform each spending department and committee how much money is likely to be available before they prepare detailed estimates."*[18] This was clearly what happened in Oxfordshire with the local authority going so far as to decide upon a specific level of

expenditure even before the Rate Support Grant settlement was announced. Their critics would say that the ruling group's enthusiasm for spending cuts led them to disregard the supply side of the equation altogether such that the cuts would have been proposed even if the Government's grant to Oxfordshire had not been so punitive - this point was, indeed, made by the NUT's Divisional Secretary in a letter to the local press at the time.

Greenwood et al. went on to identify four methods adopted by local authorities in order to apply the cuts in expenditure levels; the method chosen by an authority might have considerable impact upon an individual service. The methods identified were:

(a) The Voluntary Pool where departments simply compile lists of cuts which they are prepared to make, but where no overall target is set and no overall priorities between services are established;

(b) The Percentage Pool where each department is given a percentage figure for the cuts which it is required to make. The cuts may be the same percentage for each department or may vary between departments;

(c) Centrally Directed Cuts where the decisions on the cuts to be made are arrived at centrally and then conveyed to the appropriate departments; and

(d) Output Budgeting whereby departments are asked to analyse their programmes and to recommend policy options to the authority, thus the effectiveness of particular policies is evaluated.

There can be little doubt that the preferred option for all services would be the voluntary pool but this might fail to produce cuts of a sufficient order to satisfy the requirements of the authority as a whole - precisely the reason for its attractiveness to the individual services! Certainly each of the other options means an erosion in the degree of autonomy enjoyed by any particular service. With the development of closer political control through the central direction of the policy and resources committee these painful decisions came increasingly to be viewed as externally imposed and arbitrary. In the case of Oxfordshire the Policy and Resources committee determined centrally the extent of the cuts to be made in each service, leaving it to the service committees themselves to implement those cuts within their service.

The education service had become used to a considerable degree of autonomy in its work. As Jennings noted: *"in the time since World War II, education had been riding in the vanguard as the means of societal improvement. The importance attached to education in this regard had helped to foster a closed system of educational politics and policy-making wherein the educationalists set the goals of education, defined the means for attainment of those goals, impressed them on policy-makers and, after their ratification, administered the policies without further reference to any other party-at-interest."*[18] Clearly it would prove difficult for the education service to adjust to the new realities of the local government system and financial constraints.

With the development of the policy and resources committee as the body which determines overall objectives and levels of funding, the traditionally dominant education committee has become far less autonomous and less capable of resolving the specific problems of the education service without reference to overall strategies for the authority. The Maud Committee, in its study of pre-reorganisation local authorities, concluded that in non-party controlled authorities chairmen and officers tended to make the decisions and committees then simply endorsed these decisions. In party controlled authorities, however, a majority party and its party group would hold the 'reality of power' thus reducing the role and influence of service committees themselves, chairmen and officers. The advent of the policy and resources committee represented the further concentration of power in the hands of the party group at the expense of committee chairs and officers.

It may be safely assumed that legitimised pressure groups have a considerable preference for a situation in which officers and chairs have influence and are in a position to strike deals which they can then deliver. A situation in which the committee chair must seek approval for her/his actions from a party group which is not subject to the pressure group's normal channels of influence but yet which holds the purse strings is far from satisfactory!

"Clearly, increased party political control of local councils tends to mean an increased centralisation of decision-taking in policy matters, a decrease in the control and administration of services by committees and a shift in emphasis of committee chairmen's roles from service

representatives to political spokesmen and advisers. Party groups and party leaders, through their control of policy and resources and other functional committees, become more critical as participants and decision-makers for all services and activities."[20]

In part, the politicisation of local government brought a more democratic approach to the work of councillors. Through the party group meeting 'backbenchers' could exert a significant degree of pressure upon the leadership and committee chairs. The leader of the ruling Conservative group at the time of the Oxfordshire dispute described, somewhat ruefully, the difficulty of negotiating an end to the dispute in the face of fierce 'backbench' criticism of any suggestion that concessions might be made. Ironically, the fiercest 'backbench hawk', Brigadier Roger Streatfield, upon assuming the chairmanship of the Education Committee following the 1977 elections presided over just such a compromise solution to this protracted dispute.

When education committee chairs were asked to describe their role relative to the policy and resources committee all responded that they were obliged to justify and defend the financial requests of the service and that the committee had little concern about education policies and plans. The crucial months of decision-making usually came between the announcement of the Rate Support Grant settlement, normally in November, and the final ratification by the County Council of budget decisions, usually in February. To this extent the education service, as all services, can be said to reflect the transition from demand management to monetarism; a transition faced by the Government itself. The

traditional autonomy of the education service has been modified as the education committee has become an instrument for implementing the policy of the controlling party; as it has become increasingly important for controlling parties to impose expenditure cuts upon all services then even less scope has been allowed for education committees to 'thwart' party aims.

During a period of contraction, decisions about overall expenditure levels and the need to prioritise between spending projects and services will feature prominently in discussions within the controlling political group. The relationship between senior members of the policy and resources committee and the education committee (particularly between the chairs of each committee) will be of crucial importance to education spending. Inter-service competition for resources cannot be resolved other than through the exercise of political power. The education committee may be seen as the focal point for opposition to proposed reductions in education expenditure but it will also be expected to ensure the acceptance (however grudgingly) by the affected interests of the ultimate decisions.

"Given an expensive service, central government decrees which compel spending and a public which does not associate educational spending with rate increases, it seems that only the imposition of party responsibility on its policy-making is able to curb expenditures. Much of the control effort of the majority party is directed to this end through checks applied in the co-ordinating sub-committee and in policy and resources."[21]

The education service dominates the work of a county council, spending more than 60% of the authority's budget and dealing with issues which are sometimes extremely controversial and where cuts in the level of provision are bound to create hostility amongst the electorate. The close working relationship which traditionally existed between education officers, the committee chair and representatives of the teaching profession made the education lobby extremely persuasive. Now that the expansion of educational provision is over (for the time being at least) many party leaders locally are anxious to obtain control of the service while the conditions are right.

During a period of economic restraint the locus of power within the local government structure is concentrated in fewer hands. As decisions become ever more complex and critical the 'backbench' councillor is inclined to leave the major decisions on financial matters to "those who know the ropes", believing that they alone have the knowledge and expertise to be able to extract the maximum possible advantage from central government. The Chief Executive, Treasurer and a small group of councillors tend to be trusted with these crucial decisions and 'backbenchers' may develop a sense of powerlessness over the economic forces controlling the destiny of the council. Their very remoteness from the key decisions makes it increasingly unlikely that they will exercise their power at a later stage to resist policies determined in this way, for the primacy of economic considerations is acknowledged and this overrides individual service needs.

Traditionally, local education authorities have played a full part in preliminary discussions over the Rate Support Grant settlement with the Department of Education and Science. This input into the policy-making process is not reflected in a specifically identifiable allowance for education although some guiding observations are attached to the settlement. This system was essentially incrementalist, based as it was upon historic spending patterns. The imposition of a cash limit on the increase order changed all that; from 1975 the amount available was finite and influenced predominantly by assumptions about the rate of inflation. The imposition of financial constraints forced individual local authorities to budget much more carefully and therefore to take harder decisions about the order of priorities within and between services.

The Rate Support Grant settlement and cash limits have become the instrument by which education spending is ever more tightly restricted. Within a general grant system the education service is forced to fight for the resources which it requires and central government can do little to assist. As Evans indicates: *"its [D.E.S.] commitment to the new Rate Support Grant arrangements designed to restrict educational spending is in sharp contrast with its prime responsibility to safeguard the level and quality of provision."*[22]

It was this very dilemma which faced Shirley Williams as Secretary of State for Education at the time of the Oxfordshire dispute. Her response to this problem was to advocate specific grants for education but this met with some considerable opposition from the local authorities,

although it received a good deal more sympathetic response from the education world. As 'Education' noted: *"Mrs. Shirley Williams has shown more boldness; from the beginning she has talked frankly of specific grants. This involves a breach of principle which local authorities cannot be other than hostile to, for specific grants is the slippery slope beyond which lies the precipice of central control and direction...*

None-the-less, it is clear that many education committee chairmen (some of whom are not on policy committees) are worried about the apparent vacuum in the application of policy. What particularly concerns them is the fear that when there are sums of money up for grabs in Cabinet, it is just not possible for Mrs. Shirley Williams to specify a way in which the money could be spent within the education service."[23]

As it sought to deal with the new circumstances which it faced, the education service was required to adapt to the new power relationships. Without the Association of Education Committees to argue on behalf of the employers for greater resources for the service it came to look to the Department of Education and Science once again to uphold its interests. 'Education' thought that *"the trouble is that for the education service life in a cold climate is always particularly unpleasant. Succour, from whatever source, seems worth getting, say some. Others see only the wolf at the door; and they do not want to let him or her in."*[24]

The Evolving Central-local Relationship in Education Policy-making

In its evidence to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in 1975 the Department of Education and Science argued that the powers of the Secretary of State *"though important are not extensive"* and that *"he relies heavily on non-statutory means of implementing his policies, by offering guidance and advice through the issue of circulars and other documents."* Throughout, their evidence is punctuated by phrases such as *'adequate consultation'*, *'foundation of assent'* and *'general consensus'* which reflect the Department's consensus model of policy-making. In its Report the OECD summarised DES policy-making as being characterised by attempts to:

"minimise the degree of controversiality in the planning process and its results; reduce possible alternatives to matters of choice of resource allocation; limit the planning process to those parts of the educational services and functions strictly controlled by the DES; exploit as fully as possible the powers, prerogatives and responsibilities given to the DES under the 1944 Education Act; understate as much as possible the full role of the Government in the determination of the future course of educational policy and even minimise it in the eyes of the general public."

From these comments it is possible to deduce that the Department of Education and Science was seen at that time more as an aggregator and synthesiser of pressure group demands, responsive to the consensus view, rather than as an innovative department which sought to impose its preferred policy options upon the service. The Department tended to reflect the nature of the education world, its closed world of professionals and administrators, its perception of the importance of

'partnership', and its elaborate consultative machinery. This mirroring of the relationships to be found in education is expressed by Hugh Harding, a former senior official in the Department, when he said that:

"In retrospect I think that the department's style reflected the authoritarian nature of the education world it administered. Principals and headteachers were autocrats, and at national level great men like Lord Alexander and Sir Ronald Gould wielded much influence. The move towards greater participation in the education world was, however, only slowly reflected inside the department."[25]

The autocratic nature of the system made compromise a more likely outcome since an accommodation reached between the leadership of the respective interests would not subsequently be endangered by opposition from those affected. The ability of the respective parties to 'deliver' the support of their members was of fundamental importance to the relationship.

The relationship between central and local government with regard to policy-making in education is of fundamental importance not only to general considerations of the policy-making process, but also to the particular issue under consideration in this study. It is a relationship which has been characterised by the absence of clearly defined power relationships and in which the participants viewed their roles within the context of a partnership. Indeed the Oxfordshire dispute can be said to have highlighted the ambiguity in this relationship. Certainly the teachers had expected the Secretary of State to intervene more actively in order to resolve the dispute, and the contrast between her apparent

expressions of support for the unions and the absence of effective action (or indeed the will, the teachers felt, to consider such action) made the Department of Education and Science appear to be impotent in areas which are crucial to the delivery of the service.

Dennison believes that it is possible *"to view the relationship as a web of interaction between ministers, civil servants, councillors and officers. Implicit in this network are a series of dependencies, without them the network would not exist, but the main characteristics of the relationship are consultation, negotiation and bargaining between separate organisations, each functioning in its own political environment."*[26] Bogdanor that *"the 'efficient secret' of the system, to adapt Bagehot, was that no one individual participant should enjoy a monopoly of power in the decision-making process. Power over the distribution of resources, over the organisation and content of education was to be diffused amongst the different elements and no one of them was to be given a controlling voice."*[27]

With successive Secretaries of State for Education lamenting the lack of direct powers to effect significant changes in the service for which they were responsible and a widespread belief in the 'partnership' of central government, local government and the teacher associations, the service appeared to incorporate many ambiguities and contradictions which lent credence to the pluralist approach to the study of policy-making. Nevertheless, changes in the central-local relationship over the years indicate that the underlying relationship may well be one of more direct control and influence by central government now that the

perceived failure of the education service to meet the goals set for it in the post-war era have combined with economic recession to challenge the prevailing consensus within the service.

The 1944 Education Act sought to define the relationship between central and local government, giving considerable powers to the Minister for Education to direct his other 'partners' and to require local education authorities to produce development plans from which he would produce a development order. In fact, the powers given to the Ministry failed to produce the centralising thrust which lay behind the 1944 Act with its emphasis upon the role of the state in ensuring equality of opportunity in the nation's schools. Indeed, the enormity of the task itself made it inevitable that the Ministry would come to rely upon the local authorities and the teachers to assist in achieving the great objectives set for the service. The Ministry was soon to become a promoter of broad policy and a controller of overall resources, but the distribution of resources and local education authority expenditure remained very much in the domain of discussion, consultation and negotiation between the 'partners'. Local education authorities continued to determine their own staffing levels and educational priorities, and the teachers largely controlled the curriculum and teaching methods.

The relationship which evolved during the first two decades following the 1944 Act has been characterised as one of consensus between all the 'partners' on all significant issues for the education service. According to Bogdanor *"this process of elite accommodation reached its apogee during the post-war period when, so it was believed, many policy*

decisions in education were taken over lunch at the National Liberal Club by a troika consisting of Sir William Alexander, secretary of the Association of Education Committees, Sir Ronald Gould, the general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, and the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education. If these three agreed on some item of educational policy, it would more often than not, be implemented."[28]

In 1958 the introduction of a General Grant (later to become the Rate Support Grant) effectively ended close Ministry of Education scrutiny of local education authority recurrent expenditure - a move which was opposed by the education world. Gradually the emphasis was to change from central government inspired educational initiatives to those proposed by chief education officers in their local education authorities. When a major central government initiative was undertaken in 1965 with a view to introducing comprehensive reorganisation throughout the country the Department of Education and Science was seen to encourage and exhort rather than instruct local education authorities to change. Several local authorities resisted pressure to produce plans for comprehensive reorganisation and central government was revealed as essentially impotent when faced with resolute opposition from local authorities.

By the 1970s there was a discernible move towards greater central government intervention in the education service. Increasingly tight Rate Support Grant settlements had reduced the influence of the Department of Education and Science in financial matters, but moves towards closer scrutiny of educational standards and the curriculum

represented an attempt to arrest the decline in central government's influence and control over the education service. The launch of the 'Great Debate' on education by Prime Minister Callaghan in October 1976 (in Oxford) was not surprisingly viewed by local education authorities and teacher associations with a great deal of apprehension.

Ranson[29] believes that the changes in the central-local relationship in education policy-making may be accounted for by the theory of resource dependency. According to this interpretation, the local parties to the education 'partnership' were able to expand their power because they monopolised the ownership of critical resources that were unavailable elsewhere while possessing the sanctions necessary to reinforce such scarcity. Teachers possessed the professional expertise without which the service could not function, whilst local education authorities possessed the legal authority to implement policies as well as the alternative financial resources to resist central government pressure. Thus the local education authority/teacher association axis was able to establish predominance over the influence of central government for so long as central government was reluctant to use its legal authority in order to impose its view upon its partners, presumably in fear of alienating its most crucial resource - the teachers.

Central government has latterly reasserted itself through the extension of its financial controls over local authorities as well as the use of its legal authority to exact compliance; it has denied local authorities access to alternative financial resources and sought to undermine their legal authority in order to enhance the position of central government

in this relationship. At the same time it has challenged the expertise of the teachers and educational administrators thus reducing its dependency upon these partners.

Another theory explored by Ranson in his attempt to account for the changing central-local relationship is the influence of the economic infrastructure upon other social sub-systems in a time of economic crisis. This re-working of traditional systems theory holds that the system as a whole will survive to the extent that its constituent parts are systematically orientated towards maintaining and supporting the most important sub-system, the economic infrastructure. Faced with an economic crisis the state is driven to develop new forms of intervention in the various sub-systems in order to reassert the primacy of economic objectives through stricter controls of objectives, outputs and outcomes. This analysis approaches that of Marxist theoreticians who place considerable emphasis upon the primacy of the economic base in determining, or constraining, the social and political superstructure.

"Confronted by problems of control and integration, the state develops new policy planning processes as modes of rationality that are particularly appropriate to system strains and contradictions yet may work to reproduce them as the erosion of subsystem autonomy leads them towards conflict."[80] For education, then, the state's reappropriation of control is seen as an attempt to reintegrate the sub-system and to ensure the integrity of the infrastructure. Not only does the state seek to impose more stringent economic constraints upon the service, but it also seeks to re-evaluate the role of the education service in

supporting the economic infrastructure in terms of the curriculum and methodology.

This situation was paralleled in Oxfordshire where the local authority sought to reappropriate control over the education service not only by strongly resisting the education lobby's economic demands, but also by seeking to reassert traditional teaching methods and values which emphasise preparation for the world of work. The belief that educationalists had for too long dictated the content of the curriculum (with their tendency to view education as an end in itself) and the resource implications for the service was challenged by those who sought to reassert the primacy of economic considerations and the practical applications of education to the economic life of the nation. This attitude was perhaps best exemplified by Councillor Bond who during the course of the vital budget debate asked incredulously *"Now, what the hell are we doing teaching boys of 13 to bake fairy cakes with ratepayers' money?"*. Nor was Councillor Bond impressed by the fact that his 17 year old daughter's general studies course included carpentry! The implication was clear, money was being wasted and savings in these areas could make good the cuts elsewhere.

The Politicisation of Local Government

Traditionally local government had been far less politicised than central government, with the majority of council seats uncontested and a

large number of independent candidates (or Conservatives of an 'independent' outlook). Before 1973, for example, two out of every five county councillors were 'independent' councillors; following the 1973 election this ratio was reduced to one in seven. A former Berkshire Chief Education Officer, J.Hornsby, described the pre-reorganisation days thus: *"It was by no means uncommon in counties with a right-wing majority for such senior posts as chairman of finance and of education committees to be held by Labour councillors. Proposals before the council on major educational issues were debated on their merits with no identifiable political division in the resultant voting. The chief education officer's reports to his committee contained his recommendations which were based on educational considerations, and rarely conceded anything to political dogma. Committee agendas were prepared within the education department, and the chairman was unlikely to go through an agenda with an officer until after they had been sent out to committee members."*[1]

Education had usually been remote from political wrangling, save for the question of comprehensivisation, and had therefore evolved under the polycentric committee system into a semi-autonomous service which sought from the full council only an appropriate level of funding and the acceptance of education committee reports. This closed system of education decision-making was under threat from the new local government structure, but also from the increasing politicisation of education as such. With the major parties taking increasingly clearly defined stands on issues such as comprehensivisation and independent schools, and even on methodology and the content of the curriculum, any increased

politicisation of the local government system was bound to have a very direct influence upon the education service.

According to Hornsby *"The importance of politics within local government was gathering pace in the 1960s, and by the time of local government reorganisation in 1973 was in full flood. The political organisation of the main parties became highly structured and was a dominant factor in local government policy-making, and probably nowhere more so than in the Education Service. County councillors in general and main committee chairmen in particular became more involved and indeed more knowledgeable about the services they were concerned with. Parties became highly organised and policies within the LEAs were frequently formulated at the parties' national headquarters. Increasingly therefore the line to be followed by an LEA on a particular issue was identified not by the reports of the officials but by the party line."*[32]

In determining the budget for a local authority there are clearly important political considerations which set the parameters for policy-making and it is within the context of a local authority's overall budget that education committees and chief officers found their actions most directly circumscribed. Central Government has always exercised influence over the level of local government expenditure but until recently did not have outright power to limit the amount of money which could be raised and spent by an authority. Clearly, insofar as a local authority was able to raise revenue through the rates in order to provide the desired level of service, it could ensure that its priorities at least were adequately funded. However, an important

feature in determining the level of expenditure, and therefore the level of the rate precept, would be the attitude of the controlling group towards central government policies; for example, the Berkshire controlling group in the late 1970's strongly supported central government policies in so far as these encouraged expenditure restraint and this therefore preconditioned their approach to the budgetary process.[33]

It is clearly in the very nature of party politics that different political groups represented on a local council will have different priorities for expenditure and, indeed, different views as to the desired level of expenditure and therefore the desired level of rate increase. Ultimately these are decisions which have to be resolved through political debate in full council (although party groups may effectively pre-empt these decisions), but one must not lose sight of the importance which councillors attach to securing the maximum possible allocation of resources to the committees upon which they serve, irrespective of party allegiances. Within a particular service there will of course be considerable political disagreement over issues such as fees for music tuition, fees for school transport etc. and this too will have a bearing upon the budget for that service.

In all discussions on budgetary matters a local authority is further constrained by the need to ensure that it meets all the statutory obligations placed upon it by central government. Scope for improving the service or for effecting reductions in expenditure are constrained by the necessity of incurring a substantial level of expenditure in

order that the authority's legal duties might be fulfilled, thus restricting the options open to councillors. Nevertheless, there is always the possibility of developing specific areas of service provision or redirecting resources, and much will depend upon whether this is seen in the context of the needs of the service itself or the overall needs and wishes of the council. In the days of the Association of Education Committees there can be little doubt that to a great extent educational needs were paramount and 'political' activity minimal, reflecting the consensus approach to educational provision founded upon a belief that increased resource allocation for the education service would bring economic and social benefits.

The period since reorganisation of local government has seen a continuing emphasis upon party politics at the expense of independent councillors and councils. No doubt this is partly due to the reduction in the number of elected members serving in local government in England and Wales from approximately 34,000 to 22,400 with the result that political parties were better able to concentrate their resources. In the 1973 county council elections only 639 independent candidates were elected, with 3,750 party candidates; this reflected also the greater competition for council seats as evidenced by the dramatic reduction in the number of uncontested elections. In 1970 only 13% of all council seats were contested, by 1973 only 12% were not contested. Jennings noted that *"the 1973 elections which put into office the councils which would run the new local governments after April, 1974, were the most partisan local elections in England's history."*[34] The number of

counties under independent control was reduced from 22 in 1967 to only 4 in 1974.

The increased politicisation of local government consequent upon the reorganisation of the system brought the party system firmly into the structure of local authority work. As had happened with Parliament so one could anticipate a diminishing role for the back-bencher, a more programmatic and less service orientated approach to the authority's work, and a more effective imposition of the will of elected members on the professional officers of the authority. Whether a cause or an effect of this increased politicisation, many experienced councillors did not stand for re-election to the newly constituted authorities and, of course, the aldermanic bench, a repository of experience in local authority affairs, was also abolished. It may well be that this had the effect of putting into office people who lacked the experience of the political process and its conventions of compromise and accommodation. The combination of increased political control over the professional officers and a council of relatively inexperienced elected members might be thought to be less than conducive to the smooth running of the various services of the authority.

With the development of party political control, and the reduction in the number of councillors, it was widely believed that the influence of the heads of the respective local authority services would be reduced. Such a development would clearly not be welcomed by chief officers; indeed one chief education officer was quoted by Kogan and Van der Eyken[35] as saying that elections interfere with the planning process and

that a CEO knows his area, knows its educational and other needs much better than any lay councillor is likely to do. No doubt party control made it more difficult for chief officers to persuade councillors to consider the needs of the service before the wider needs of the council! Certainly chief education officers were required to develop their 'political' skills if their preferred policy options were to be achieved.

As can clearly be seen the corporate management techniques which were introduced simultaneously with local government reorganisation were not popular with committee members. Many had feared that the predominance of policy, or policy and resources committees would threaten the autonomy of the education committee in particular. It was also felt that decisions which would have a fundamental bearing upon the level of service which could be provided might be taken at some considerable distance removed from the point of impact of these decisions. It is perhaps unfortunate that local government reorganisation and the introduction of corporate management techniques should have coincided with a period of economic recession with its inevitable pressure for expenditure restraint. Nevertheless, for those who had been education committee members before reorganisation, often in small unitary authorities, their power to determine the level of educational provision appeared to have been seriously undermined.

The chief officer who sought to resist the growing influence of the party group and the policy and resources committee was swimming against the tide. According to Jennings *"decision-making was moving up and out*

of government. It was moving up from sub-committees, committees and co-ordinating bodies to policy and resources and out to the controlling party group and its leaders. It was becoming centralised in the hands of fewer and fewer influential politicians rather than being done at several lower levels through relatively wide participation by members and officers. Additionally, the controlling party and its leadership had substituted party aims for community needs or wishes: being elected was taken as a mandate from the community to put the party programme into action."[36]

The Oxfordshire Experience

Oxfordshire provides a good example of the effects of local government reorganisation in England and Wales. The boundaries of the county were extended to incorporate a significant part of what had formerly been Berkshire when the Vale of the White Horse was incorporated into Oxfordshire. The county also absorbed the old County Borough of Oxford with its first tier functions, including education, and the City was reduced to the status of a second-tier authority. The reorganisation also saw the introduction of organised party politics into the County Council. The Oxford Times, reporting upon the reorganisation, said *"Party politics are in. Although Oxford City Council has had party divisions for a long time, politics have (on the surface anyway) been kept out of most county council business".*[37]

Oxfordshire County Council prior to local government reorganisation was a local authority in which political parties were weak and in which

leadership on the Council was based on seniority and status. The influence of status on leadership is demonstrated by the list of Oxfordshire County Council Chairs up until reorganisation:

1889 (provisional)	Lord Valencia
1889-1890	Lord Jersey
1890-1911	Lord Valencia
1911-1930	Mr.W.H.Ashurst
1930-1934	Brigadier-General A.D.Miller
1934-1937	Mr.W.H.Goodenough
1937-1967	Lord Macclesfield
1967-1970	Mr.T.L.Easby
1970-1974	Viscountess Parker

It is worthy of note that although Messrs Ashurst and Goodenough were not peers of the realm their status within society led them to be included in Walford's Directory of County Society.

As late as 1961 all 64 councillors on Oxfordshire County Council were elected as independents and by 1967 only 21 were representatives of a political party. Clearly then, the adjustment to the more politicised atmosphere of a reorganised county council was going to prove difficult and swift for Oxfordshire.

The new authority was enthusiastic in its support for the new management techniques as indicated by the following extract from 'The New

Oxfordshire; Reorganisation of Local Government', a pamphlet designed to explain to the people of Oxfordshire the new local government structure.

"It has become more and more apparent that local government must secure a co-ordinated approach in administering their services since each one must fit in with an overall plan for the whole area. To this end the Government commissioned a report, now known as the Bains Report, giving advice to all local authorities on management structures. One recommendation of the 1974 Committee (set up to oversee the implementation of Oxfordshire's reorganisation) is the creation of a central Policy and Resources Committee, with three sub-committees dealing with Finance, Personnel and Land and Buildings; a fourth sub-committee to review performance in reaching objectives will be suggested for future consideration. In turn a fairly traditional pattern of committees will be recommended to administer the various services, subject to overall control on policy issues. It will be of the utmost importance for the new County Council to appoint their new Chief Executive Officer as soon as possible after the April elections so that it may have the benefit of his advice on all these matters."[88]

Local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire appears to have been a particularly traumatic experience for some. According to Sir William Hayter, former Ambassador and a respected observer of education in Oxfordshire, the 1974 reforms marked a distinct change of priorities. He observes that *"A change in policy seemed to coincide with the accession to Oxfordshire of districts formerly a part of Berkshire, a county where rigid attention to the repression of rates was a first priority. It is*

reported (but I have never been able to trace the origins of the report) that a councillor from one of these newly acquired districts exclaimed publicly:"I was elected to reduce educational expenditure in Oxfordshire; I haven't seen action yet."[39]

In a later (1985) review of the centralising trend in education the Chief Education Officer for Oxfordshire took a jaundiced review of the reforms. He said *"1974 is probably as significant a year as any from which to trace its origin. The year heralded a local government reorganisation based not on the recommendations of the Maud Royal Commission but on a tawdry compromise, born in an atmosphere of Bains, a report on corporate management which dominated the thinking if not the working arrangements of most new authorities."*[40] Tim Brighouse saw the practical effects of the reform in terms of the internal power struggle within the local authorities. *"Aided and abetted by the leading members who, for long, had suffered at the hands of the overmighty education officers and especially Alexander, the clerks and treasurers were determined to take their revenge. And so they did."*[41]

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THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE POLICY-MAKING PROCESS

Any study of the policy-making process in education will be concerned with certain fundamental questions which underlie the application of the process to any particular policy issue. Inevitably a study will seek to identify the locus of effective power in the process, to examine the constraints within which policy-makers are required to operate and to identify and evaluate the various influences upon the policy-making process. In this way it will be hoped that some order can be brought to a complex process and some rationale supplied for the policy outcomes.

This particular study focuses upon a specific example of policy-making in Oxfordshire in the 1970s and the approach adopted is therefore that of the case study. The case study is a convenient and attractive method for studying policy-making insofar as it seeks to analyse in some detail the processes and pressures which when applied to a specific set of circumstances produced a particular policy outcome. It can therefore help to identify key points and events during the process, to assess the significance of particular factors to the eventual outcome and to shed light upon the power relationships underpinning the whole process.

Superficially, therefore, the case study appears to be a valuable 'tool' in developing our understanding of the policy-making process. However this method of study suffers from two significant problems which need to be borne in mind when assessing the utility of a case study approach. Firstly, and self-evidently, the adoption of a case study approach means that conclusions reached can only be of limited application, for the

case study concentrates upon the detail of a specific instance of policy-making. Case studies provide us with examples which may well help to shed light upon more general issues but they do not seek to provide a comprehensive theory of policy-making. It is perhaps possible to imagine that given a sufficient number and range of case studies it might be possible to piece together from their conclusions some theories of general applicability. However, such a range of case studies does not exist, nor are the case studies necessarily undertaken in such a way as to facilitate comparisons between them or to ensure that their approaches highlight common features between one study and another. One should therefore be extremely wary of drawing general conclusions from specific studies.

Of perhaps greater significance is the problem that case studies are sometimes perceived to be neutral in that no conscious attempt is made to apply a particular theory of policy-making to the specific circumstances of the study. However, any study must of necessity be selective in the facts, events and processes which are deemed to be significant or relevant to the study. Part of the process of study is the continual questioning, probing, the exploration of potential avenues of further study and decision-making as to which aspects to pursue and which are unlikely to be productive. To such decisions must be brought value judgements which will be as crucial to the course of the case study as would any more overt value system or theoretical approach. One student may identify a problem which becomes the focal point, or topic, of a study whereas for another student that topic is no more than a resource, a means towards analysing a more fundamental problem or topic.

Perspective therefore influences a case study no less than any other means of study.

Whereas the case study approach must, by definition, deal with those issues which are on the policy-making agenda it does not deal with questions such as who controls the agenda, which items are excluded from the agenda or how a particular item came to be upon the agenda. The relevance of these questions is largely determined by by one's theoretical approach to policy-making; for some the key question is why certain issues never reach the agenda at all, for others the agenda may be viewed as neutral with the main issue being how agenda items are transformed into policy outcomes. Similarly the theoretical approach adopted will determine the way in which a particular issue is perceived. Is the problem, for example, with the decision-making structure within a local authority, central government policy towards local authority expenditure or the crisis in the world economy. The level at which a problem is perceived, the distinction between a topic and a resource, the focus upon the most significant factors in the process are not neutral decisions; they are choices which are largely determined by our theoretical approach. By extension, our study will be seen as complete when we have reached conclusions or provided an account which appears to satisfy those criteria which our perspective has caused us to consider as paramount.

There are four major perspectives on education policy-making and this chapter will attempt a brief explanation of each and to apply this to the events of the Oxfordshire dispute. In this way not only will the

assumptions and limitations of the case study be illuminated but also, hopefully, fresh insights into the events of the dispute will be provided. An attempt will be made to extract from the mass of detailed information surrounding the policy-making process those values and relationships which underpin the whole process and which determine the parameters within which the participants must work.

The theoretical perspective which is most closely identified with the case study is pluralism. Pluralism views the state as virtually neutral in the policy-making process, simply providing the apparatus for implementing policy decisions reached through the institutions of representative democracy. Through these institutions all citizens and groups of citizens have access to the policy-making process, the outcome of which in any given case cannot be predicted. Pluralists therefore value the case study approach which seeks to identify those groups or factors which influence a particular decision.

Pluralism views competition between various interests within society almost as an end in itself, somehow producing appropriate mechanisms for the resolution of conflict. Pluralist thought approaches policy-making very much from a descriptive point of view; it does not seek to explain why things happen nor what should happen, but rather would claim to concentrate upon what actually happens. Pluralism views the policy-maker as subject to conflicting pressures from a range of affected interests who seek to influence decisions in their favour. The task of the policy-maker is to produce an outcome which, as far as possible, reconciles the competing claims of the various interest groups within the political

objectives defined by those who hold political power. The pluralist regards pressure groups as the very essence of the policy-making process.

Systems theory views policy-making in terms of the conversion of inputs into the political system or sub-system to those outputs which will ensure continuing support for the regime. Thus, through rational calculation and analysis on the part of those in authority the perpetuation of the prevailing social, economic and political order is secured. When analysing a particular policy decision systems theory will concentrate upon how wants are converted into demands which find their way on to the policy-making agenda; how the need to maintain and generate support for the system and the regime affects the policy and how successful the policy outcome is at securing that support.

Marxism sees education policy-making within the context of the political, economic and social forces at work within society as a whole. Education serves several purposes within the capitalist system; it produces an appropriately educated workforce and thereby the nation's economic well-being, it performs a socialising function which serves to lessen the class antagonisms inherent in the system and it forms a part of the 'social wage' which represents a perceived benefit to individuals provided by the system. Policy-making in education must therefore be viewed within the wider context which will constrain policy-makers and restrict the range of their responses. Although the state apparatus has as its prime responsibility ensuring the perpetuation of the capitalist economic system it has also to manage the contradictions which are

inherent in a system which generates conflict within and between economic and social sub-systems.

The final theoretical perspective which will be examined is neo-liberalism. This is a theory which in essence is based upon a belief in the benefits to be derived from the unfettered application of market forces to all aspects of social and economic policy. In the sphere of education neo-liberal analysis has called into question the lack of parental power to select the school of their choice for their children; it has advocated a range of solutions such as the introduction of a voucher system thus making schools more responsive to market forces. In their analysis of the policy-making process neo-liberals have viewed the public sector in general, and education in particular, as being dominated not by the needs and interests of the client group but by the needs and interests of those employed to provide the service. Sheltered from the cold wind of the free market, teachers have conspired with local education officers and civil servants to produce an education system which reflects their interests and educational objectives at the expense of parents and pupils.

These theoretical perspectives will be examined in turn and applied to events in the Oxfordshire dispute. That they are dealt with as distinctive approaches towards the study of policy-making should not be seen as indicating that they are necessarily contradictory world-views. There is, in fact, considerable scope for overlap between the various theories and their explanations of, for example, the actions of a particular pressure group might not be as diverse as might be expected

from a somewhat simplified outline of the theories. Indeed, certain analysts of the policy-making process pride themselves upon having incorporated features from more than one theoretical approach in their particular analysis.

It is possible that particular theories of policy-making are more appropriate to analysis at one level than another. The applicability of the pluralist case study approach has already been identified whereas other approaches might lend themselves to macro-level analysis. This chapter attempts to assess the benefits to be derived from applying each theoretical approach in turn to the events of the Oxfordshire dispute as well as identifying any problems with the application of each approach.

Systems Theory

Systems analysis takes as its starting point the view that all social systems are composed of interactions whose relationships to one another are described in terms of inputs to and outputs from the system which are linked by a series of 'feedback' loops. Such interactions are therefore not random but are a function of the rules governing the system and the roles pursued by the actors within the system. It is possible to abstract from the totality of social behaviour throughout the social system that particular set of interactions which form the political system, that is to say those interactions through which values and resources are authoritatively allocated for a society. Within that society there will also be sub-systems, or parapolitical systems, and local education authorities fall within this category, being systems

which also are responsible for the authoritative allocation of resources and values but responsible only for a restricted range of matters.

Political systems (and by extension, parapolitical systems) exist in an environment which consists of all those other interactions within the society for which it is responsible, as well as interactions in other societies in so far as these impinge upon the society in question. This environment furnishes disturbances to the system, that is to say activities which can be expected to, or do, displace the system from its current pattern of operations, regardless of whether this is stressful for the system. These environmental disturbances become inputs, or demands, which the political system is required to address and, if necessary, to convert into outputs in order to modify the environment and so ensure the continuation of the system.

Such a theory must take as its fundamental premise the commitment of policy-makers to the perpetuation of the system and their ability to make endless rational calculations with this end in view. This not only implies a remarkable ability on the part of policy-makers to make countless decisions with almost scientific precision, it also reduces decision-making to the level of computation; this does not accord with the experience of most of those involved in the process!

Systems analysis has been applied to studies which seek to illustrate the policy-making process as a method of analysis which enables the student to examine a complex whole and try to understand it in terms of the inter-relationship of its various parts. Systems analysis can help

to identify certain key variables as well as certain regularities in the way in which the various parts of the study are related; this it does by requiring the student to look at problems in terms of the 'needs' of the system.

In essence, systems theory perceives the political system as a mechanism for converting environmental disturbances, represented as demands, into authoritative outputs, represented as allocations of resources or values, in order to regulate the environmental disturbance and therefore reduce the possibility of sufficient stress developing within the system that its continuation is threatened. The system must ensure that it continues to generate support in order to ensure its survival, and this support too becomes an input into the political system. Support is focused on three main components of the political system: the political community, which is to say the group which supports the system, the regime which is the structures and rules whereby authoritative decisions are reached, and the authorities who are the people responsible for making the decisions. The regime is more than just the political 'rules of the game', representing rather a set of restraints on political interaction consisting of values and norms as well as the structure of authority.

The main disturbances to the equilibrium of the system are the wants of the members of that system who seek an authoritative allocation in their favour. Wants themselves will not secure an authoritative allocation, but wants which are converted into demands will elicit a response from the system. Wants are therefore reduced through collection and

combination into a common demand through the structure of the political system and by the norms and values of the society, for without such a process the system would be unable to cope with the inputs into the system in any meaningful way. Responsibility for demand regulation, it is argued, is the function of interest groups, political parties and administrators who will be exposed to the multitudinous wants of the populace but who, in order to develop effective strategies for influencing the policy-making process, must reduce these wants to a limited number of demands which can become part of a programme of action. A demand may therefore be defined as a want which has reached the political agenda as a basis for a political decision.

Clearly no political system is capable of meeting all the demands placed upon it, and no amount of demand regulation by the 'gatekeepers' of the political system can alter this situation, for each allocation will have a cost in terms of resources or support. However, in order to ensure its continued existence, or at least to avoid the possibility of demands for political change, the system must respond to sufficient demands so as to avoid significant loss of support. Demands might be aggregated or modified by the authority but it is essential that the system avoids the creation of cleavages within the society resulting from an aggregation of unsatisfied wants or demands, for from such cleavages may result threats to the continued existence of the system itself.

The system must be sensitive to loss of support and will respond to a perceived loss of support by homogenising the membership of the system (e.g. by the exclusion of dissident minorities), making structural

changes to the regime (e.g. creating consultative machinery), offering specific outputs to specific groups (a favourable resource allocation) or creating a higher level of diffuse (non-specific) support. Evidence of support building is often provided by the incorporation of pressure group leaders in the process of policy formulation over a particular issue, sometimes with consequent leadership problems for those leaders when a compromise solution is presented to their members for approval. However, no system could survive on the basis of continuing and diverse allocations in favour of the countless specific groups within the society, and all systems must rely to a considerable degree upon diffuse support, a more generalised attachment to the system which is based upon outputs over a considerable period of time. Without such support an authority would be unable to handle day-to-day problems and therefore it must ensure that it at least continues to act in accordance with the fundamental tenets of the regime in order to ensure a continuing measure of diffuse support. On a practical level, establishing consultative machinery for organised pressure groups may lead to the acceptance by them of otherwise unpalatable policies rather than throw doubt upon the viability of the consultative machinery itself.

In analysing the policy-making process in any particular instance it is important to ascertain the degree of specific or diffuse support for those in authority at the time of the decision. The extent to which pressure groups will be able to influence policy may be considerably affected by the degree of support attaching to the authority and a perception of a lack of support for the authority, either over a

particular issue or in general terms, is likely to reduce the willingness of a pressure group to compromise.

In Britain there is clearly considerable support for the 'system' (although there is considerable disagreement as to how such support is engendered) and whilst particular governments might bemoan the volatility of specific support based upon specific outputs, there are other inputs and supports which serve to maintain the system. Hall et al[3] argue that interest groups are relatively content with the system so long as it gives them some influence over policy-making even though they might not succeed in obtaining all their wants or satisfying all their demands.

According to these observers of the policy-making process:
"Much apparently deep-seated conflict is precisely an attempt by organised groups to discover the limits of their power.....
The lengths to which competing groups will go in order to influence an event is usually uncertain. For this reason alone, different bodies within the political system frequently compete, jostle for advantage and engage in open conflict to test their relative strengths. But these activities are largely a prelude to, rather than a rejection of, an eventual compromise."[4]

This is a description of pluralism at work within the framework of a system which generates a considerable degree of diffuse support thus enabling it to contain much seemingly damaging conflict. Much support, then, stems from the support which is felt for the regime, that is to

say for the 'rules of the game' and the values of the system. Nevertheless, the system will need to demonstrate that it is responsive to the demands made of it over a period of time and it uses feedback from the system in order to ascertain its effectiveness in this direction and to modify further its outputs if this is necessary. The outputs (intended results or authoritative allocations) are not always the same as the outcomes (actual results of such allocations) but the intention of these allocations is to alter the environment which gave rise to the original demand. The extent to which the demand is modified or abandoned will reflect the success of the allocation and if a modified demand is then proposed the authority will have to decide whether a further allocation is required.

The importance of pressure groups in systems analysis cannot be over-emphasised for they serve a vital function in making and transmitting judgements as to how claims should be modified in order to increase the chances of success, and about what demands can appropriately be made on government. Pressure groups themselves will reject certain claims and modify and group others in order that these might be made more acceptable to those responsible for authoritative allocations; they thus provide a valuable service to those in authority. Pressure groups in turn offer to those in authority the possibility of building specific support by an authoritative allocation in favour of those represented by the group and this may manifest itself in the voting behaviour (or other appropriate demonstrations of support) of those concerned; equally, support may be withheld where no authoritative allocation is made. The involvement of pressure groups in the policy-making process therefore

represents the enlightened self-interest of the authority in so far as it produces inputs and feedback to the policy-maker as well as a channel for increasing support for the authority and the regime.

There is thus a mutual reinforcement of interests through the development of effective channels of communication between those in authority and those representing particular interests. Legitimised pressure groups perceive a direct benefit from a close relationship with those responsible for allocating resources, which provides beneficial resource allocations in their favour at a low cost in terms of disruption to their internal organisation. Legitimised pressure group leaders will recognise the possible adverse effects upon their resources and membership of open conflict with those in authority. Such conflict will also have an adverse effect upon the relationship between the pressure group and the authority which may in turn reduce the ability of its leaders to secure favourable allocations in the future.

For those in authority the benefits of working closely with influential pressure groups are not simply related to the avoidance of potentially damaging conflicts. Pressure group leaders are more likely to take a long-term view of matters than are their members, and they are also more likely to demonstrate a willingness to compromise and to accept adverse as well as advantageous decisions if they believe that the long-term interests of their members are best served by such a compromise. There is, of course, a considerable degree of mutuality of interest in ensuring that consultations are seen to be effective in securing

resources for pressure group members or clients, and securing support for the authority, the regime and the pressure group leadership.

Although it would seem that pressure groups are external to the political process in policy-making, the extent to which they are able to exert pressure upon those in authority is often somewhat constrained. In seeking to modify the actions of those who hold office through the electoral process considerable influence may be exercised if a pressure group is in a position to persuade the electorate of the need to modify their voting behaviour to the extent that this might threaten the re-election of the office holder. However, pressure groups are by their very definition not concerned with obtaining positions of authority within the political system and their membership and support is therefore likely to be drawn from across the political spectrum. The larger the pressure group (and therefore the greater the perceived electoral threat) the more heterogeneous is likely to be the group's support. The smaller the pressure group, the less of an electoral threat is posed. Unless, therefore, a pressure group is able to engender widespread support for its view and, at the same time, persuade those in authority that this view will override other electoral considerations in its supporters' minds at election time, then its electoral threats may be perceived as relatively innocuous.

As a general rule one can anticipate that legitimised pressure groups, who enjoy significant rights within the appropriate consultative machinery, will be far less likely to seek to influence the voting behaviour of their members or the public than will be the case with

'external' pressure groups who have far less to lose from such a potential alignment. In this respect it is particularly noticeable that teachers' trade unions have demonstrated a marked reluctance to enter into the political arena, and indeed their central organisation is only too quick to respond to any local initiatives which might threaten the neutralist approach of the unions. None of the teachers' unions has affiliated to a political party (although the National Union of Teachers flirted with the idea in the 1920s) and the affiliation of the two largest unions to the Trades Union Congress has seen the teachers take an abstentionist role in all TUC debates which might be termed 'political'. Even when an apparently clear case for supporting a particular political party, as seemed to be the case in Oxfordshire in 1976, the teachers' unions will only make veiled references to the need to ensure that votes are used to support candidates who will support increased educational expenditure. The system thus exacts a price for legitimisation such that it in turn limits the extent to which legitimised pressure groups will seek to mobilise popular opinion against those in authority in such a way as to threaten directly their position within the system.

Although the direct electoral threat of pressure groups may be limited, that does not render them insignificant in the policy-making process. Pressure groups perform a valuable role as 'barometers' of public opinion and are influential because of their ability to apprise politicians of public (or, at least, a section of the public) opinion on particular issues. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that certain

pressure groups become closely enmeshed in the very process of policy-making. As Hall et al[5] note:

"many groups are regarded as legitimate elements in the policy-making system as a matter of tradition and established practice. Their role is institutionalised to the point where consultation rather than pressure is a more appropriate term." In the context of the education service it is clear that the teacher associations believe that they have achieved this status.

Archer, in developing her theory of resource dependency places education pressure groups on a continuum according to their access to the resources of wealth, power and expertise. In her view, groups with low access to all these resources will be in the weakest negotiating position; those with differential access to the various resources will be in a stronger negotiating position; those groups with a high degree of access to all the resources will be in the best negotiating position. According to this theory of resource dependency, policy-making is a question of transactions between the various actors. Archer herself says that *"Outside influences do not flow into the system by an equivalent of osmosis....They have to be transacted."*[6]

Transactions take the form of exchanges of the resources at the disposal of the various actors and, given the disparities between the resources at the disposal of each group, exchange transactions and power relationships will be inextricably linked. Whether a relationship is one of reciprocity or control will largely depend upon the 'rates of exchange' for the various resources at any given point in time. In this

context Archer highlights three different types of negotiation which take place within the education system between various groups.

Internal initiation of policy involves changes in the education service from inside the system by educational personnel and this involves negotiation with official authorities and external interest groups. In such negotiations the principal resource of the education profession is its expertise which it exchanges for other kinds of resources which it needs in order to achieve its own goals, such as increased autonomy. External transaction involves relations between internal and external groups and is usually instigated from outside the education service by groups seeking new or additional services. The principle resource of these external groups is their wealth and this is exchanged for educational expertise. The third type of negotiation involves political manipulation, that is the exercising by central and local government of their legal authority and capacity to impose negative sanctions.

Once the policy-making process is viewed from this perspective then it is possible to analyse the bargaining strengths of the respective groups. According to Archer a group will be at its strongest in negotiations when the other party to the negotiations cannot reciprocate in terms of resources, cannot obtain from elsewhere the resources which it requires, cannot coerce the first party into supplying these resources and yet cannot resign itself to going without these resources. To the extent, therefore, that the polity can reduce the capacity of the education service to reciprocate for the resources supplied by the state, is able to bar access for the education service to alternative

suppliers of resources, can block the access of education pressure groups to political power and can promote ideologies favouring political intervention, it will be able to increase its control over the education system. Fluctuations in the 'rates of exchange' militate against the creation of a situation in which such control is likely to be established on a permanent basis.

Archer's theory assists in addressing the question of how the various inputs into the system are actually processed - it affords a practical manifestation of the political process and begins to account for the differential responses to these various inputs. Resource dependency theory does not assume that within the system power and influence are evenly distributed or that power relationships are immutable. Indeed, the system survives because it is able to accommodate changing power relationships.

Systems theory has been criticised for its lack of attention to the importance of ideological factors in determining how demands should be dealt with and that it places undue emphasis upon the maintenance of equilibrium from the perspective of authorities whilst underplaying the importance of motivation, differential perception and the distribution of power. It is essentially a theory which accepts things as they are, which seeks to provide policy makers with the technical knowledge with which to solve problems as perceived by policy makers themselves - it does not seek to challenge those perceptions. Archer's theory, for example, places considerable emphasis upon the role of the state and the effects of this upon transactions within the system, yet it does not

address the issue of why the state should intervene or why the education system changes.

It can be argued that systems theory appears to fail to account adequately for the different reactions of different systems to their environment, indeed its somewhat bland description of the inputs and outputs of the political system seems to avoid any thorough analysis of the relationship between the environment and the political system itself. Howell and Brown[7] believe that systems theory is less a general theory than a framework within which analysis of the theory of political authority can be undertaken.

Despite the somewhat Machiavellian emphasis on the mechanics of defending a position of political power to the exclusion of ideological factors, systems analysis can provide the student with a framework which highlights the relationship between demands, support and the policy-making process. It helps to illuminate the process of demand regulation and the mechanisms through which political stability is maintained, and it therefore deals with many of the practical issues of policy-making in a political sub-system. What systems theory takes little account of are the motivations for change within a system or of the actors within a system. Its concentration upon the maintenance of the system belies the significance of actors who seek to use the system to effect change.

Howell and Brown[8] denoted five aspects of systems theory as a model of policy-making which assisted them with their case studies, and this

would certainly serve as a useful framework for any study of the practical business of decision making in the education service:

a) the concept of local education authorities as sub-systems whose operations can only be understood by reference to other sub-systems and the political system itself;

b) the process of want-conversion and demand-reduction through the process of collation and combination, and in coping with the possibility of demand overload as well as the identification of 'authorities' and their role in the presentation of policy initiatives;

c) the parts played by the authorities, the regime and the political community in the generation and maintenance of support;

d) the operation of feedback and the effect of outcomes upon the members of other sub-systems, their perception of these effects, the communication of these perceptions through demand modification and variation in support, and the systematic response; and

e) the distinction between outputs (planned consequences od decision-making) and outcomes (their unintended consequences).

Such a framework as this would seem to provide a sound starting point for analysis of the policy-making process notwithstanding the reservations already expressed. Policy is seen not as the product of consensus but as being determined more by the demands of certain social

situations which are seen as virtually imposing particular courses of action, albeit these will often be perceived by the actors involved as being consensus based decisions. Seen in this light all public provision is viewed as a functional prerequisite or imperative for the continuing existence and development of society; pressure groups, far from playing a significant part in determining policy, act as collectors and articulators of demands and as agencies for developing and quantifying support for those in authority.

Clearly, even the most ardent proponent of systems theory would not deny that authorities themselves also contribute to policy-making on many occasions by adding support to certain proposals, initiating proposals or indeed acting as a partisan on certain issues. The question of whether authorities are inert or creative in social policy-making, whether they are centralised and monolithic seats of political power or part of a system of autonomous (or semi-autonomous) modes of power and influence lies at the heart of systems theory. In so far as they are initiators of policy, authorities are perceived from the systems perspective as acting out of enlightened self interest through a response to a perceived demand; ideology and altruism would not satisfy the systems theorist as an adequate explanation for a particular policy decision.

Viewed from the perspective of the systems theorist the disturbances to the sub-system (Oxfordshire Local Education Authority) in the Oxfordshire dispute were the adverse economic consequences of central government's rate support grant allocation, and the growing resentment

of the teacher associations at repeated cuts in education expenditure. Whether it is within the compass of systems theory also to embrace the further constraining factors in the form of the increased politicisation of local government consequent upon local government reform in the early 1970s may be open to doubt. However, disturbances can be identified and systems theory may offer a means of analysing the events surrounding the dispute.

Faced with the Government's decision to reduce the Rate Support Grant to Oxfordshire it is clear that the survival of the sub-system required that action be taken to ensure that the County Council would be able to continue to provide the finance necessary to provide the desired level of service. This entailed either raising additional funds, presumably through a significant increase in the rates, or reducing the level of service provided by the authority. A failure by the sub-system to make an appropriate response to this new situation would no doubt have called into question the continuing autonomy of the local authority. For those in authority the desired output should ensure not only the maintenance of the system but should also be such as to ensure continuing support for their political position. The judgement as to whether more support would be engendered (or less support lost) by cutting services or by raising the rates must remain in the arena of political controversy. On this occasion the ruling party formed the view that its support would be maximised by restraining the level of rate increase albeit at the cost of a reduced level of provision.

However, once the decision to cut services had been made the system remained subject to disturbances as those who perceived themselves to be adversely affected by these decisions sought to have them reversed. The teacher associations performed the function of demand reduction and conversion by focusing their campaign upon the two issues of the teacher/pupil ratio and job losses. Many other issues were open to them since the cuts in the education service spread wider than this, but clearly the leadership determined primarily to pursue these issues. Initially the system failed to respond to the demands of the teacher associations when the formal and informal consultative channels were explored. The campaign therefore moved to a direct public challenge to the ruling group, seeking to erode support for the regime to the extent that it would be forced to modify its policies or face the loss of political power.

It is quite apparent that the level of diffuse support for the system was high; there was never any threat to the system itself from the pressure generated in an attempt to modify the authority's actions. The public debate on the proposed cuts centred upon the specific support for those in authority amongst those most closely involved in the education service, specifically teachers and parents. The teacher associations used disruption of the service, leafleting, public meetings and demonstrations in order to bring the issue into the public arena; the Council used its political spokespersons and officials to explain to the public the decisions it had taken.

It may be argued that the Authority's failure to engender sufficient support for its policies might ultimately have led them to make concessions to the teacher associations. However, by then the ruling party had already fought an extremely successful election campaign and had been returned to office with a greater majority notwithstanding the debate on the education cuts. Clearly the election result would be taken to indicate that the authorities and the system were under little threat and that the level of diffuse support remained high.

It is possible to view the Oxfordshire dispute in terms of resource dependency. During the period of expansion of the education system the expertise possessed by the teaching profession was a resource which was in demand and which therefore placed the teachers in a strong position in discussions with their employers on educational developments. The low level of politicisation also placed teachers in a strong position as their mutually acknowledged professionalism acted as a strong force in discussions with their employers. With the need to reduce expenditure and with the growing politicisation of the local government process the esteem accorded to the profession was lowered in the eyes of the politicians.

The suspicion on the part of Oxfordshire's politicians of comprehensive education and progressive teaching methods served to undermine the perception on their part of the authority's dependence upon the teaching profession. The teachers sought to demonstrate the system's dependence upon their expertise by withdrawing their services; they were unable to sustain their action indefinitely but did succeed ultimately in

persuading the Authority that a compromise which ensured their continuing co-operation was desirable. Thus the dispute may be seen as marking a sea-change in the relationship between the teachers and their employer which resulted in a clearer understanding of their relative dependancy upon one another.

Whether the degree of rational analysis implied in the relatively sophisticated approach towards support-generating outputs in systems theory can actually be seen in evidence in the day-to-day practical decision-making of a local authority is perhaps open to doubt. Nevertheless, whether or not the actors in the process perceive themselves as responding to the needs of the system it is clear that fundamental to their actions is a desire to ensure the maintenance of their position of political authority or influence. Systems theory can perhaps help to explain the rationale behind decisions which actors may at times believe to have been almost instinctive!

The Marxist/Neo-Marxist Model

The Marxist or neo-Marxist approach to the analysis of policy-making is predicated on the belief that the apparatus of the state in capitalist society exists primarily to serve the interests of capital. In its more crude application Marxism describes the political and social superstructure as being determined by the economic base of the society; however contemporary Marxist thought takes a far less deterministic view of this relationship. Clearly, given the primacy of the interests of capital, political and social structures which were contrary to the

needs of the capitalist system would not be permitted to develop. However, the nature of the capitalist system is such that it inevitably creates contradictions within and between the economic, political and social structures of the society. These contradictions create tension which the state is required to manage in order that class antagonism does not develop to such an extent that the capitalist system itself is threatened.

Thus policy-making represents a process of reconciling social and political demands with the needs of the economic system. The education system provides a good example of this process in that it not only serves directly the interests of capital but also creates demands which conflict with the needs of the economy. It is the education service which is charged with responsibility for training the future workforce and thereby providing a supply of labour power appropriately equipped to provide the surplus value from which capital is created. In addition, education performs a function of social control both through the content of the curriculum (or, perhaps more importantly, the exclusion of issues from the curriculum) and through inculcating values of individualism and self-improvement along with a vision of a society in which the efforts of the individual will be reflected in their ultimate status within the society. In this way the failure of individuals to advance their social or economic position can be explained by their failure to take advantage of the opportunities made available by the education system and an 'open' society.

In serving this social and political function the education system also generates its own values and needs which may be divorced from the primary purpose of the state - serving the interests of capital. By emphasising the role of education in self-advancement, and indeed by its emphasis upon self-improvement, the system creates demands for a universally high (and improving) standard of educational provision, open access and equality of opportunity which in turn makes demands upon the economy. Education has become a part of the social wage and attempts to reduce, or at times even to limit, educational expenditure in the interests of the economy creates resistance, tension and conflict. Education is thus an area of political struggle and the state must seek to manage the demands generated thereby and the consequent tensions generated in other spheres of policy-making.

Social and political sub-systems generate a degree of autonomy in their decision-making structures provided, as always, that they do not directly contradict the requirements of the capitalist economy. Indeed the development of such autonomy is an integral feature of the ideology of capitalism with its emphasis upon freedom for the individual and a limited role for central government. Contradictions and tension are therefore inherent in a capitalist economy and the role of the state and the apparatus of government is to manage these. The Oxfordshire dispute would in this analysis be represented as evidence of the contradictions between the economic management of the education service and the political demands generated by the service.

Whereas pluralist theories concentrate upon case studies of decision making in order to demonstrate the resolution of conflicts of interest, Marxists and other 'elite' theorists focus upon the policy making agenda, how it is set, and in particular which issues are kept off the agenda. The power of an elite, it is argued, rests in its ability to control the agenda thereby suppressing real conflicts of interest and real choices. It is the issues which do not appear on the agenda which demonstrate the extent of elite hegemony.

In their study of the relationship between the teaching profession and central government, Lawn and Ozga[9] view the concept of 'partnership' within the education service as a response by the state to the growing economic and political awareness of the teaching profession in the 1920s which was leading teachers to adopt an increasing affinity with organised labour and a socialist political outlook. They see the state as taking an active role to protect the interests of the prevailing economic order through a series of measures which had the effect of inhibiting the growth of class consciousness among a group whose 'politicisation' could pose a very real threat to the perpetuation of the values upon which the economic and social order rests.

In their analysis they strike at the very heart of the pluralistic assumption of policy-making with its emphasis upon a diffuse distribution of power and influence, and the ability of organised interest groups to establish a legitimate role in the policy-making process as autonomous actors. They challenge the 'consensus' view of the education service and view the concepts of consensus and partnership as

a means by which central government and local authorities might better frustrate the aspirations of the teaching profession whilst ensuring the continued delivery of the service. Whatever the perceptions of the various actors their actions served the interests of the ruling class.

This particular study points to the 1920s as a focal point in the development of the concepts of consensus and partnership within the education service. Until this time, they say, teachers had been subjected to a great deal of centralised control over their training, the school curriculum and other aspects of their employment. However, due to a range of factors (including salaries issues) the teaching profession was becoming increasingly militant in the 1920s, participating in strikes and indicating widespread support for the Labour Party. Therefore *"The Conservative philosophy of managing education which was developed in the twenties was created in response to the movement of teachers leftward and the inheritance of central state guarantees, if not central state intervention, in a locally administered system. Open centralisation by direct intervention was no longer necessary."*[11]

Although an increase in teacher militancy, and an apparent wish on the part of a significant number of teachers for closer links with organised labour, might be lessened by the granting of partnership status, this effectively disguised the fundamental differences which existed between teachers and their employers. It concealed, for example, state control over the supply and training of teachers, and separated teachers from parents. In other words, the rhetoric of partnership served to conceal

the fundamental relationship between teachers and their employers which is that of inequality of power. By granting limited autonomy to local authorities and teachers, the government could ensure continued delivery of the service whilst ensuring that its overall control of the service was not challenged. The political calculation was that by developing a belief amongst teachers that their status as professionals set them apart from other workers, their acquiescence would be guaranteed.

"The teachers were to be won to arguments of a professional partnership by reducing the arena where this could operate, by constructing the arena without teacher involvement and by controlling the definitions of acceptable behaviour, that is, the definition of a teacher and of professionalism."[12] Thus the view that the partnership which exists (or existed) within the education service represents the realisation of the pluralist ideal is challenged at a fundamental level. For Lawn and Ozga it represents a systemic response to an environmental disturbance. It represents an attempt by the state to control a political crisis which was closely connected to an economic crisis at the time. It ensured the continuation of the power relationship with a minimum of disruption; it increased the diffuse support for the system within the teaching 'profession' and it masked the basic inequality between the 'partners'.

If this is indeed the case then it would appear that the rhetoric of partnership was so strong that it also succeeded in convincing several Secretaries of State for Education that they were without effective powers. When Fred Mulley was the Secretary of State for Education he would often complain that his only power was to remove air-raid

shelters; although few would concur with Mr. Mulley's somewhat jaundiced view of his restricted powers, the difficulty experienced by Secretaries of State in ensuring, for example, the introduction of comprehensive education have indicated the perceived limitations to the power of the Department of Education and Science.

Shirley Williams, when Secretary of State for Education and Science, commented that *"there isn't much direct power in the hands of the Secretary of State except in a number of rather quirky fields; there is (however) a lot of indirect influence"*[1] - an attitude which may well have contributed to the criticisms of her role in the Oxfordshire dispute.

Evans[2] views the 1944 Education Act as being clearly aimed at giving the Ministry of Education control over the service: *"The clear intention of the Act"* he says *"was to put the new Ministry of Education firmly in charge of the educational enterprise in England and Wales. The shift in the balance of power was justified in terms of the serious pre-war inequalities of educational provision and opportunity between different areas: in the post-war years the stronger hand of the central authority helped to reduce the extent of such variations."* For whatever reason, the power relationship remained without clear definition whilst the education service was receiving favourable treatment in terms of resource allocation from central government. During the first two decades following the 1944 Act it was widely perceived that a consensus evolved between all the 'partners' in the education service (although

this excluded the clients) and that the emphasis was firmly upon resolving problems through discussion and by agreement.

Certainly the elaborate consultative procedures which evolved within the education service, and the problem solving approach of Alexander and Gould, often in the relaxed surroundings of the National Liberal Club, created a strong picture of power being devolved to local education authorities and teachers. If that perception is widely shared then, in a time of expanding provision, the reality of policy-making is likely to reflect these perceptions. That central government retained control over the supply and training of teachers was not seen materially to affect the many decisions regarding the nature and delivery of the service which were largely left to the consultative process. Whatever the state's reasons for granting greater influence to the teaching profession it was not likely that the teachers would fail to exploit such an opportunity.

If the intention of creating a locally administered system was to enmesh teachers in a partnership and a consensus which would deflect their attention from political activity then it has been a success. However, it would seem that the partnership also developed a momentum of its own and came to assume a far greater importance than might originally have been envisaged, a contradiction which might be seen as inherent in the strategy adopted. Not until economic recession forced a reassessment of these relationships did central government begin to reassert itself with the effect that teacher militancy and 'politicisation' was engendered.

Clearly, in a society which is based upon a capitalist economic order there will be a tension between the requirements of industrial production and the direct accumulation of wealth on the one hand, and those of reproducing the conditions in which such wealth creation can continue on the other. Further tension is generated by the conflicting demands of economic forces and the political need to sustain a strategy of partnership. Education is placed at the focal point of this conflict and whilst it must serve the interests of capital through the production of a socially compliant workforce, and may be used at times to 'buy' broad social and political consent by accommodating educational demands, it remains an expensive social service and a potential drain on the process of capital accumulation. Furthermore, the education service itself can serve to create and reinforce demands for social justice and equality which may not lead to compliance on the part of the labour force.

Marxists do not claim that those who ostensibly hold power and influence through the institutions of the state are unequivocally representatives of the ruling class, although they are required to serve the interests of that class. It cannot, therefore, be held that in questions of social policy a series of sophisticated calculations are made by an all-powerful state apparatus as to the extent to which social policy changes might be permitted without these presenting a threat to the prevailing economic order. Indeed, Marxism accepts that the various institutions of the state enjoy a degree of autonomy as part of the contradictions inherent in the system. Thus the education system generates demands from the local education authorities and even the Department of Education and

Science which may well conflict with the economic needs of the capitalist system. Instead it is argued that social policy remains subservient to economic policy (witness recent attempts to reduce public expenditure for the purpose of stimulating economic regeneration), and that social policy is consequently subservient also to the interests of capital. The economic order serves to constrain the policy options when proposals are made and so perhaps the crucial question for Marxists is not "what changes have taken place?" so much as "what changes were not permitted to take place?".

Given that Marxist analysis has become somewhat more sophisticated in its application by many who hold its fundamental tenets to be sound, it essentially requires the policy analyst to address the question "whose problems do the policy makers seek to solve?". This in turn leads to identification of the contradictions or tension which policy-makers are attempting to manage in any given situation; it is this which is the key to Marxist analysis of the policy-making process.

In viewing the Oxfordshire dispute from a Marxist perspective it is necessary to place the dispute in the context of the state's need simultaneously to manage social, economic and political problems whilst ensuring that the long-term interests of capital are not adversely affected by developments in any of these areas. At the time of the dispute the national economy was in a state of crisis thus greatly reducing the ability of policy-makers to manage tensions through a favourable allocation of public funds; at the same time fundamental questions were being asked about the failure of the political and social

systems to produce the conditions for economic prosperity. The education service found itself at the centre of this debate both in terms of the economic demands being made for a reduction of expenditure on education and in pressure to ensure that the education service should provide more relevant education and training, to ensure a closer 'fit' between the worlds of education and work, and also to inculcate 'correct' attitudes in students.

At a national level Government was making increasingly urgent requests to local authorities to reduce the level of their expenditure; at the same time significant changes to the level of Rate Support Grant available to local authorities were being imposed. Much discussion revolved around the supposedly deleterious effect upon the private sector of the economy of the apparently ever-increasing level of public expenditure. At that point in time it was fashionable to point to the deleterious effect upon the private sector of the economy of the ever-increasing level of public expenditure and its failure to produce the economic results which were in part a justification for devoting large scale resources to the public sector and not least the education service.

At the same time the Government was launching its 'Great Debate' on education which sought to identify the shortcomings of the education service in the way in which it had allegedly failed the nation's economy and parents. Oxfordshire County Council certainly reflected the tenor of the times with regard to the education service and other public services; if the cost of these services was hindering the growth of the

economy then cuts would have to be imposed. It would certainly seem that Oxfordshire's Conservative group included many supporters of the newly ascendant Thatcherite school who responded to the economic 'crisis' by rejecting consensus politics in favour of a more aggressive brand of neo-liberal thought. The cuts represented a reassertion of the primacy of capital accumulation.

The pressure of the economic crisis and a far more critical attitude towards the work of the education service created (or, a Marxist might say, exposed) tensions between national and local government, between politicians and administrators, between the economic imperatives and the aspirations of teachers and parents. As the Government's policy of reducing local government expenditure was put into effect by local education authorities it was met with resistance from those most closely affected by the spending cuts, primarily the teachers and parents. For the teachers this represented a political problem and teacher unions utilised their well-established access to the political machinery of local government in an attempt to mitigate the impact of such policy decisions.

In Oxfordshire the economic situation was particularly acute as a result of the adverse treatment which the County received under the Government's reallocation of Rate Support Grant. In such a situation the teachers were to discover the limits to the power which they enjoyed through their access to the political process. Whilst teachers were able to exercise a considerable degree of influence over policy-makers when issues were internal to the education service or it was a question of

ensuring that education received its share of the local authority's resources, they found themselves relatively powerless in a situation where economic and social pressures created significant counter-tension to their political demands. As their political pressure was clearly failing to produce the desired result the teacher unions resorted to making economic demands; taking their case outside the political process and mobilising members and the public to confront directly the outcome of the policy-making process.

The dispute highlighted the inability of local government to act with complete autonomy either economically or politically; it exposed the extent of local authority dependence upon central government. The Government had become aware of the need to reform the education service if it was to meet the needs of the economy more effectively and in this it sought to involve parents in an alliance against the teachers. The 'Great Debate' was the beginning of this process and the years since have witnessed further steps in this direction. This alliance was hindered at the time of the Oxfordshire dispute by the need to reduce education spending which helped to foster an alliance between teachers and parents within the County. Nevertheless the dispute clearly signalled to teachers that their incorporation into the policy-making process was no longer to be taken for granted. A strategy for the management of the education service which incorporated teachers, a consensus approach, was no longer appropriate.

A Marxist analysis of education policy-making during the 1950s and 1960s would take a critical view of the consensus, or partnership, view of the education service. During this period the underlying power relationship

was merely obscured by the absence of economic and social pressures which severely restricted the ability of teachers to operate effectively in the realm of political solutions. A management strategy which involved teachers closely in policy-making reflected not only the absence of overt differences between teachers and state objectives at the time, but was also effective in ensuring that teacher unions did not challenge the fundamental purpose of the education system - the supply of an appropriately trained workforce. The state therefore reinforced ideas of 'professionalism' amongst teachers as a means of securing compliance and an effective delivery of the service.

The Oxfordshire dispute marks a turning-point in teacher-state relations. Pressure for dramatic reform of the education service to fit more closely the needs of the economy, the restructuring of local government in order to ensure closer political control over local services such as education, and the impact of the economic crisis upon the education service clearly exposed divisions between teachers and the apparatus of the state. The history of the education service since 1976, with the increasing alienation of the teachers, has largely borne out the trends which were evident at that time.

Pluralism

All theories of policy-making have a distinctive view of the role of the state. As already explained the systems theorist sees the state as a largely defensive and reactive structure which concerns itself less with questions about who gets what, when and how than about how the system

and the ruling regime may be sustained. It is the existence of a system for regulating wants within the society and converting these wants into demands and, in turn, converting these into outputs which maintain or generate support, which provides for stability within the society. The state is therefore not neutral since it actively intervenes in policy-making with a view to securing its own continuation. Its actions represent self-interest rather than ideology but this self-interest makes the state responsive to public wants and demands.

Marxist theory views the state as primarily serving the interests of capital. Within the capitalist system the central government and local government may develop a degree of autonomy in dealing with the tensions inherent in such a system but they must ultimately not work against the long-term interests of capital. The state must therefore take an interventionist role to the extent that it is required to manage the contradictions and tensions between the political, economic and social problems generated by the system.

Neo-liberal theory views the role of the state as essentially one of securing the appropriate conditions for the operation of market forces. Neo-liberals point to the extensive intervention of the state in the lives of its citizens through a much expanded welfare state, increased state ownership of industry and the placing of restrictions upon private enterprise as the prime factors in the nation's economic problems. For neo-liberals then social and economic issues should largely be determined by the operation of market forces and not through the

intervention of the state. Theirs is a minimalist view of the role of the state.

The pluralist approach towards the study of policy-making is based upon a theory of the distribution of influence over the decision-making process. It views the state and the political system as neutral in themselves and as the battleground for competing interests whose interplay results ultimately in policy initiatives. It holds that whilst political resources are not distributed equally between competing interests, the inequalities are not cumulative and therefore serious cleavages within the body politic are avoided. Pluralists are therefore chiefly concerned with seeking to determine which particular interest or pressure groups contributed towards a specific policy decision and how the outcome was eventually determined. Essentially, pluralism purports to be based upon practical experience and observation of the policy making process and consequently pluralist analysis reflects the complexity of that process.

The pluralist view is largely descriptive; the actors within the decision making process are not seen as having a particular model of decision making in mind when participating in the process, but by their words and actions it can be seen that they appreciate that policy making is influenced by competition between affected interests. It may not be an articulated model of policy making but, according to pluralists, it does reflect what is actually in the minds of the actors in the process. Thus, inevitably, individuals will form interest groups in order to maximise their impact upon the decision making process, and they must

consider that the ability to influence decisions is within their power. This is a view which closely accords with a liberal political outlook which views the state's role as largely to act as the 'honest broker' between competing interests. During the Oxfordshire dispute the N.U.T. Regional Official, perhaps unwittingly, provided a classic statement of liberal/pluralist belief; he told listeners to a Radio Oxford 'phone-in' *"democracy is very largely the operation of pressure groups, of interest groups."*[16]

In his analysis of the policy-making process Lindblom[17] draws a distinction between the systematic, comprehensive and dispassionate analysis of policy issues and the 'political' factors which normally prevail in policy-making. Lindblom concedes that ideally all policy-making would follow a thorough analysis of the problem under review and the policy options available; however decisions taken as a result of such a process would only be accepted to the extent that those affected by the policy considered the process to be infallible. No doubt those charged with responsibility for determining a local authority's budget would like to place themselves well along the continuum towards such rational decision-making. In the Oxfordshire dispute, as in other instances, opposition to policy decisions is countered by an explanation that decisions have to be taken on the basis of all the relevant facts, dispassionately analysed and balanced before a policy outcome is reached. It is hardly surprising that such confidence in the 'scientific' and dispassionate nature of the policy-making process is not shared by those who perceive their interests as being adversely affected by such policies. Had the local education authority been able

to convince the teachers that the education cuts were the logical consequence of a dispassionate analysis of all the relevant factors then the dispute might have been avoided - in the real world such confidence in the decision-making process is not readily discovered!

Furthermore, dispassionate consideration of the policy options will not in itself help to resolve conflicts of value and interest within society. Whilst such a 'scientific' approach towards policy-making might be extremely desirable it is nevertheless impractical, according to Lindblom, and society must seek alternative means for determining policy initiatives and resolving conflicts of values and interest. Lindblom draws attention to the many instances in society where interactions, rather than rational analysis, resolve problems; for example the way in which market forces can solve the problem of allocating scarce resources. He says that *"interactions themselves often solve, resolve, or ameliorate problems. Interactions set or make policy. As problem-solving and policy-making processes, interactions constitute an alternative to analysis."*[18]

A distinction is drawn between the scientific ideal of rational analysis devoid of politics, and the strategic ideal which emphasises the inadequacy of analysis and therefore the need for politics to predominate through the competition of ideas and interests in society. The contest between partisans is what produces effective policy-making and contributes to rational decision-making because only partisans can be counted upon, as a result of their own self-interest, to bring to bear every fact or argument germane to their interests. *"Pressing as*

they do toward ever more formal scientific techniques, the advocates of the scientific vision press toward the kinds of political and administrative organisation supporting those techniques. They tend toward moving authority from voters and legislatures into a highly trained bureaucracy.....In contrast, the advocates of the strategic vision are pluralists. They wish to keep authority diffused."[18]

Clearly, then, interest groups have an important part to play in the pluralist decision-making process. The state is perceived as relatively neutral (although Lindblom readily concedes the uniquely influential role of the business community in influencing governmental decisions) with the various interest and pressure groups providing the information and analysis which enables legislators to formulate policy. Interest groups assist in the formulation of a feasible agenda by drawing together a range of issues, and certain groups may become accepted into the very structure of the decision-making process as representatives of an interest which is entitled to be consulted. For the pluralist, society's main assets in problem solving are its diversity, conflict, openness and improvisation.

The concept of widely diffused power as being a characteristic of Western capitalist economies is essential to the pluralist theory of policy-making, for if power is concentrated then conflict will be unequal and outcomes predetermined with the consequential effect that conflicts will tend to become cumulative and deep cleavages develop which may threaten the stability of the society. If power is widely diffused then interests must accept that their view will not always

prevail and that compromise is an essential feature of the policy-making process. There is, therefore, a tacit acceptance by pluralists of the assumption of consensus in policy-making, that affected interests will by and large accept the outcome of the policy-making process even where this is not their preferred outcome, and that access to the policy agenda is open to all. That is not, of course, to say that all participants in the process will of necessity accept the outcome irrespective of its effects upon their particular interests, but that there is a recognition of the need, on occasion, to accept adverse policy outcomes in order not to endanger the very process which enables interests to be represented.

Pluralism may lead towards a greater facility for compromise on a day-to-day basis, but where fundamental issues are involved then consultation cannot itself necessarily resolve that conflict. However, in the case of the Oxfordshire dispute it is apparent that it was partly the lack of consultation with the leadership of the teacher associations in advance of the decision to reduce expenditure which provoked a hostile initial response from those leaders whose role as opinion formers should not be under-estimated.

Hall et.al. focus attention upon the question of consent and this is clearly of fundamental importance to the pluralist theory, for this is based not upon the dominant position of one group over all others but upon the acceptance by interested parties of the legitimacy of the decision-making process. They ask: *"What, in the last analysis, does consent mean? It may be granted readily and enthusiastically or be*

enforced by the acquiescence of those whose ability to resist is spent. It may be bought at a high or a low price. Whose interests can be passed over because they have no power? Which interests command enough power to wrest consent from a reluctant government? Which interests are so closely affiliated with prevailing conceptions of the public good that their dominance goes unquestioned?"[20] A theory of policy-making which emphasises the importance of conflict and partisan analysis must surely address itself to such questions if pluralism is to be shown to be more than a façade.

The 'cosy' consensus view of policy-making has sometimes been applied to the education service. This view concentrates upon the similarity of interest of those involved in the policy-making process, seeing them as all sharing a common objective albeit viewing the issues from different perspectives; it emphasises the importance of co-operation, negotiation and mediation between the various actors with policies being agreed, democratic and evolutionary. This theory has often been applied to consideration of education policy-making with its emphasis upon partnership and coalition building as the partners seek to work towards their ultimate shared goals with a broad agreement upon the intrinsic worth of education and a shared belief and faith in the value of the enterprise. Nor can this theory be lightly dismissed when studying the education world of the 1950s and 1960s when it is clear that many of the participants in the policy-making process for the education service took the view that such a relationship existed and was to the benefit of all concerned. However this 'partnership' was the subject of challenge subsequently as resources became more scarce, and may perhaps now be

viewed as more appropriate to a period in which positive sum issues (where there are no 'losers') predominated and which could not survive the transition to a phase of zero sum issues where conflicts became sharper.

According to McNay and Ozga[21] *"The consensus, if it existed, was a fragile one. A more convincing image would permit the different participants to hold different views of what they were doing, yet all believed that it amounted to the same broad extension of opportunity. The ideological function of consensus was to conceal the conflicts among participants and the enormous gap between policy rhetoric and practical reality."* For them the idea of partnership was no more than a tool for managing the teachers. It served to conceal the contradictions and tensions which existed between the education service and the political and economic requirements of the state, and also to conceal the underlying power relationships within the education service. This the state was able to achieve because for a period of time social and economic circumstances were such that the education service was largely able to resolve its own problems internally and without significant differences of view which might have exposed the true power relationship.

Certainly it is true to say that the participants had their view of what they were doing underpinned by somewhat different priorities, yet their perceptions of their roles were not such as to challenge their 'membership' of the education partnership. For the teacher associations the interests of the service and the pupils were synonymous with those

of the teachers themselves; a well paid workforce, enjoying good conditions of employment, with a high degree of autonomy in a well-resourced service, was to the benefit of all. The active participation of teachers in the policy-making process to their minds reflected their professionalism and expertise which, although subject to 'lay' control, denoted them as the educators, the sine qua non of the educational process.

During the 1950s and 60s the primacy of the professionals went largely unchallenged. Certainly there were times when teachers were forced to accept unpalatable decisions (not least an increase in their pension contributions!) but few decisions which encroached upon their judgements as professionals were taken without the agreement of teacher association leaders. The resolution of problems within the education service at this point in time was largely a matter of a telephone call between the General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers and the Chairman of the Association of Education Committees. If conflicts between participants were concealed by this consensus it would certainly appear that they were also concealed from the participants.

Pluralism may also be viewed as representing a balance of power relationship in which scarce resources are exchanged for power. Since the value of specific resources is not a constant, so no one group will predominate in a system which is based upon exchange of resources for power. According to this view all organisations are dependent upon others for certain resources and, in order to achieve their goals, must exchange their resources. It is this need which constrains each

organisation and requires them to operate within established procedures. Variations in the balance of power between organisations depend upon their goals, their relative power and the availability of resources to them. This relationship will vary between one issue and another and will also vary over a period of time, thus outcomes are never predetermined and no particular interest can establish dominance over the others.

For some the policy-making process in education highlights the 'triangle of tension' between the Department of Education and Science, the Local Education Authorities and the teachers, welded together yet held apart by the stress in the system as they each pull in a different direction. It is not essential to pluralist theory that a consensus should exist between the various actors as to their objectives - indeed such would be a rare occurrence. Nevertheless, within an 'institutionalised' relationship such as can be seen within the education service an overriding commitment to the delivery of an effective service may bind together the actors in the policy-making process despite their apparently contradictory objectives. Common agreement on processes for the resolution of conflict and over policy outcomes can serve to bind together seemingly disparate interests.

To a greater or lesser extent all pluralist theories assume the relative neutrality of the state in the process of adjudicating between competing interests, rather than viewing the state as a promoter of particular interests. However, few would claim that the policy-making process exhibits no bias whatsoever, merely that there is no systemic bias which would predispose any group to the view that its representations will

always be unsuccessful. Hall et.al. formulate a theory of 'bounded pluralism' of which they say: *"Our proposition is a simple one: that the making of day-to-day policy on social issues in Britain does operate within a distinctly pluralist process, but that the limits of policy-making are set by elites which for many purposes are indistinguishable from....a ruling class."*[zz]

It is thus possible to bring together the ideological theories of policy-making with the pluralist conception of the neutral state. Competition between the various interests may take place within the parameters set by the existing economic and social order; an exchange of resources may take place within the constraints placed upon the process and thus a consensus may prevail based upon implicit assumptions concerning the terms of reference for the policy-makers.

Lindblom suggests that his original pluralist theory should be modified to a pluralism II. In justifying this he says:

"Although I continue to see great value in social and political pluralism if, when, and where it can be practiced, I see in actual practice only a limited amount of it in contemporary polyarchies. When I have argued that the policy-making agenda in these systems is typically incremental, an implication is that many non-incremental issues simply do not appear on the agenda. Why? Because (among other reasons) with respect to many issues, including many of the most fundamental issues concerning political and economic structure, there exists no pluralism of opinions or of political initiatives sufficient to bring them to the agenda. In other words, a highly homogeneous (and indoctrinated) set of

attitudes and beliefs governs us - specifically, constrains what governments can do. Roughly speaking, I have suggested, politics is pluralist only on secondary issues, not on primary issues."[23]

Lindblom incorporates into pluralism II the significant influence of class hegemony - an aspect of policy making which he believes to have been neglected in much pluralist thought. *"Many pluralists"* he says *"have taken the trouble to try to ascertain the importance of class conflict in creating political cleavages or subcultures. They have tended to miss the more subtle influence of upper-class obliteration of cleavage and subculture through a historical and continuing narrowing of the range of political belief and attitude through favoured class positions in instruments of communication: organised religion, government, media, and face-to-face relations among others."*[24]

Lindblom's pluralism II is a form of 'bounded pluralism' wherein the actors, even when involved in policy making on secondary issues, are constrained, albeit unwittingly, by the influence of class hegemony. Furthermore, primary issues such as the economic structure of the society are resolved without the operation of pluralist forces since there is no pluralism of opinion which would lead them to be placed upon the political agenda - the effect of class hegemony is such as to render these 'non-issues'. However, Lindblom's revised pluralism still leaves a significant area of policy making in which pluralism will operate. Within the value system inculcated by ruling class values there will be conflicts of interest over secondary issues which are resolved through the pluralist process. Indeed, the value system of the 'contemporary polyarchies' (and Lindblom primarily refers to the U.S.A.) serves to

encourage a degree of diversity and competition within the parameters established by the prevailing economic and social order. That such activity may serve to distract attention from primary issues and reinforce class hegemony does not detract from the significance of pluralism in the policy-making process at the secondary level. Within the constraints imposed by the primary political issues there lies considerable scope for pressure group influence and for pluralist analysis. Lindblom's revision of 'original pluralism' may question the universality of its application but does not reduce its significance at the secondary level.

It follows from what has already been said about pluralist theory that no discernable pattern of policy-making will be readily identified, other than that the process will be characterised by the involvement of various interest groups. Outcomes are not predetermined (although they may not be inconsistent with the primary political, economic and social requirements of the system) and this helps to account for the diversity of solutions engendered for broadly similar problems. A good example is provided by the education service in England and Wales which is characterised to a significant degree by the diversity in the arrangements for its provision throughout the country as a whole thus demonstrating the possibility of a wide range of 'acceptable' responses to common problems.

The pluralist approach to the study of the policy-making process is to utilise the case study, a detailed and empirical study which seeks to determine the degree of influence exercised by the various interests in

any particular instance. In discussing the use of case studies in educational policy-making Hargreaves says that *"The really important issue, however, is that in an internally differentiated or decentralised system, the restrictions of expediency lead not to uniformity but to diversity of educational provision; a state of affairs which is further compounded by the many-sided nature of the conflicts and negotiations concerning education that are played out, with different results, in each locality."*[25]

Shipman[26] views education policy-making as a grid which depends for its shape and organisation upon pressure groups pulling away at the corners. Thus the tension which is generated by the conflicting pressures on the policy-making process is what gives it its shape; that the recognition of this by those involved in the process binds them together and leads them to accept compromise solutions to policy issues. This grid he sees as having as one axis the financial, legal and administrative controls of central government, and as its other axis the professional and academic pressure from the teaching profession. He believes that developments result from the interaction between these two axes and that *"the advantage of this model is that it focuses attention on identifiable groups which are organised to exert influence rather than on detached concepts such as the state, the system or ideologies, which cover up the often messy reality in school or government. It avoids suggestions of cosy consensus among partners. The assumption is that the service works because the conflicts of interest are resolved.....in most cases there is agreement over how the game should be played, however fierce the conflict during it."*

Shipman concludes that it is often difficult to find where the power lies in the education world between the centre, the locality, the professionals and voluntary bodies. This lack of clarity, however, he views as a condition for limited central control despite the considerable powers given to the Secretary of State by legislation. *"For all the emphasis placed on the responsibilities of the Secretary of State in the 1944 Education Act, it is a service that is not easy to change because many parties can exert influence at the centre, in county or town halls, or in schools and colleges"* he says. *"They may all play by the same rules which may support social, economic and political arrangements, but the different partners press their own, often conflicting interests and the horse trading for better and for worse inhibits speedy unilateral action."*[27] Recent developments may perhaps have led us to call into question the assertion that swift unilateral action by the Department of Education and Science is inhibited - certainly the 1980s have witnessed a significant challenge to this approach.

The view from the Ministry/Department of Education often appears to reinforce the pluralist view of decision-making with its concentration upon the restraining influence exercised by the various affected interests. Anthony Crosland, when Secretary of State for Education, felt that in many areas *"the only influence is an indirect one that is exercised through HMIs, through DES participation in the Schools Council, and through Government sponsored research projects like the one on comprehensive education. The nearer one comes to the professional content of education, the more indirect the Minister's influence is."*[28]

Again, the experience of the 1980s has called these statements into question, yet this may serve only to emphasise how great was the influence of the 'partnership' theory that successive Ministers and Secretaries of State failed to comprehend and utilise the powers at their disposal for almost forty years after the 1944 Education Act.

The pluralist approach to the study of education policy-making places considerable emphasis upon the relationship between central and local government and the teachers' unions, with its attendant preference for balance, consultation, limited central government power, and the promise of agreement rather than conflict. There can be little doubt that many of those closely involved in the process have shared this reassuring view of their role and, whether or not they were unwitting victims of a strategy designed to secure their acquiescence in reducing the potential of challenges to the system, this perception clearly had a significant influence on many policy decisions.

Pluralism offers a superficially attractive explanation of the policy-making process in the sphere of education. Many of the participants in the process themselves hold a pluralist view within which conflicting demands are recognised but are reconciled through discussion, negotiation and consultation. The formal structures for consultation, from teacher membership of education committees, to the late lamented Schools Council, and through the widely recognised informal contacts, the view prevails that all conflicts of interest should be resolved within the service through compromise, accommodation and a recognition of the constraints within which each of the 'partners' has to work.

Occasionally the formal and informal structures fail to reconcile conflicts and they spill over into the public arena. None of this is inconsistent with the pluralist view of policy making.

Much in the pluralist approach accords with our perceptions of the realities of the process and hence to our common sense. We can see the elaborate consultative machinery of local and central government, the process of negotiation and compromise. We can witness occasional outbreaks of conflict but know that this will be contained within the framework of the existing system of government, and that the eventual outcome will reflect a compromise which will seek to restore the consensus. The Oxfordshire dispute can be presented as a classic example of this process.

However, with their emphasis upon the case study approach, pluralist accounts of the decision-making process may serve to obscure underlying influences which might be revealed by more systematic analyses. In adopting a case study approach to education policy-making which concentrates upon the 'nuts and bolts' of the policy-making process and the diversity of influences within and upon that process, it is necessary to avoid making the whole process so elusive as to confound systematic analysis within an overall theoretical framework.

Neo-liberalism

During the 1970s the neo-liberal approach to social policy came to achieve considerable prominence, not least in the world of education.

Essentially the neo-liberal analysis of social policy is a critique of the welfare state and the adverse influence exerted by excessive state intervention in the life of the nation. Neo-liberal, or New Right, thinking was by no means a new phenomenon. For many followers of this school of thought its founding father was believed to be Friedrich Hayek who had begun a sustained critique of 'creeping socialism' at the end of the Second World War. His fundamental belief in the dangers of a corporate, consensus-based, society was clear: *"The essence of the liberal position, however,"* he wrote *"is the denial of all privilege, if privilege is understood in its proper and original meaning of the state granting and protecting rights to some which are not available on equal terms to others."*[xx] Such privileges were extended to organised pressure groups to the detriment of the consumer.

John Gray takes Hayek's argument further to explain why the democratic process is, in itself, not only unable to protect the consumer but in fact often works against those interests which it ostensibly protects. He says that *"The classic role of the liberal state has been as a provider of these [public] goods. In an unlimited democracy, on the other hand, it is almost impossible to confine the state's activity to goods of this sort. It is easy for highly concentrated interests, often those of powerful producer groups, to influence legislation or catch the ear of a Minister. Such concentrated interests act as powerful constituencies in the struggle for the resources government has at its disposal; and they tend almost inevitably to defeat those interests, often those of consumers, that are widely dispersed and hard to organise*

effectively. Unlimited democracy soon becomes government by pressure group, and the public interest is the first casualty."[30]

The welfare state, it is argued therefore, generates a substantial bureaucracy which, rather than seeking to serve the interests of the nation, becomes a self-serving influence upon social policy seeking to protect its interests rather than to promote the interests of its client group. Thus educationalists are seen to be more concerned with ensuring their continued employment on favourable conditions of service rather than concentrating upon the interests of their pupils. The neo-liberal, on the other hand, places greater emphasis upon the importance of market forces in seeking to secure social objectives, believing that a reduction in the size and influence of the welfare state bureaucracy allied to an extension of personal choice and responsibility will produce better social policy decisions. Indeed the contrast is drawn between the restrictions placed upon the free market in order to ensure fair competition and the lack of constraints placed upon pressure groups in their attempts to secure an advantageous position. *"Producer pressure groups"* by which he means all trade unions and groups of firms *"emerge and maintain their existence only when there are net benefits from such pressure. In the commodity market place, such illegal activity is known as conspiracy and is subject to anti-trust laws. Not infrequently, however, collusion, entirely legal, occurs through the political process, where groups exert pressure on politicians and their bureaucracies in pursuit of additional political benefits to those that ordinary, legal activity would provide."*[31]

Neo-liberals believed that the education service in the 1970s was responsive neither to public preference nor to the imperatives of international competition and demand. The education system was essentially disfunctional, producing a strongly anti-business culture and leading to a shortage of the skills required for the economy and a surfeit of sociologists! It was these issues which they sought to address through a challenge to the prevailing orthodoxies of the day.

The education service had for many post-war years been seen as the cutting edge of the welfare state. The optimism with which the education service was viewed represented not only the hopes of parents and politicians alike that it would promote talent and lead to universal betterment and a harmonious society, but also a belief that increased expenditure on the service would result inexorably in higher educational standards, greater equality of opportunity and the eventual eradication of social deprivation. That the service had failed to produce these desired ends was almost universally accepted by the late 1960s; the Labour Party placed its hope in comprehensive education, the Conservatives became increasingly critical of state provision itself.

Neo-liberals did not confine their criticisms of the state education service to the resources which were being allocated to it. A fierce debate ensued upon the nature and content of the curriculum and the methodology of teaching, with the neo-liberal position becoming, perhaps somewhat crudely, identified as a call for a return to basics and discipline. Not only was the education service criticised for failing to achieve the objectives set for it by the motivating forces behind the

1944 Education Act, but 'progressive' teaching methods were held responsible for many of the social ills of the time including the promulgation of an anti-business culture. The insidious and debilitating effects of the educational consensus in particular was set out by Digby Anderson in his article on State Subversion of Private Initiative[**] : *"The essence of the problem is of attitudes. The sheer size of the state sector, especially education and welfare, and its occupation of the commanding heights of the 'ideological economy', the education system, when added to its buying power in the private sector, enable it to establish norms, standards, expectations, even moralities, which are generalised. If people in private enterprise think and respond like members of collectivised industry, it is because they come from the same schools and colleges; they draw on the same general culture; they see the motivation and standards of statism as usual."* The professionals thus found themselves under sustained attack from many quarters; the education 'Black Papers' produced by prominent neo-liberals within the ranks of the Conservative Party were accompanied by the Callaghan Government's 'Great Debate' on education - viewed by teachers as an open invitation to criticise their work.

Certainly it is true to say that the 1970s saw a transition from universal investment in the education service in order to raise standards, towards targeting social policy on disadvantaged groups. The identification of Educational Priority Areas, for example, represented an initiative to resolve a specific problem with a specific allocation of funds; it was not an initiative which met with universal approval from the professionals who thought that a further increase in overall

expenditure on education was required in order that standards might be raised for all. By this time, however, such a call was likely to go unheeded. A growing perception on the part of many local and national politicians, who were gradually having to face the prospect of reduced funding for public services, that a call for greater overall expenditure on education reflected teachers' self interest rather than a solution to the problems of the education service was prevalent. Although many of those who criticised the work of teachers and schools, and pointed to the failure of the education service to 'produce the goods', could by no means be classified as neo-liberals in terms of their overall political outlook, nevertheless they often tacitly accepted the neo-liberal critique whilst differing as to the solutions to be proposed. The neo-liberals sought to increase the role of the private sector; others believed that the answer lay in improving state provision.

To a large extent the neo-liberal critique was a product of the economic crisis which faced the nation in the 1970s. It used the need to reduce public expenditure as an opportunity to pose fundamental questions about the provision of public services. Specifically, it posed the question of value for money and posited that the private sector was a much more efficient provider of services than was the public sector. Exposed to the harsh economic realities of competition and market forces, it claimed, the wasteful use of resources within the public sector would be eradicated and once again these services would be forced to provide the consumer with value for money. Given their vested interest in ensuring the perpetuation of the status quo with teachers being cushioned against the need to respond to parental pressure through the operation of market

forces, considerable opposition could be anticipated to any moves which challenged this position. *"Since the public provision of education includes the dissemination of anti-business values, it is scarcely surprising that efforts to increase the role of private enterprise in health care and education encounter strenuous opposition from vested interests. It is almost as though the NHS and state education services had their own advertising agency, propagating an anti-business or, as its proponents prefer to call it, 'post materialist' culture."*[83]

Shipman, not himself a neo-liberal, nevertheless highlights the critical attitude towards education spending at the time when he comments that *"When education is viewed as one public service among many, the importance of the drift away from universalism is highlighted. Until the mid-1960s it was possible to believe that increased investment in schools would lead to the implementation of the 1944 Act and to raised levels of attainment among all groups. Increase the resources, and the professionals would ensure that standards rose. More resources would mean a better education for all. The available evidence does not support this.....*

"Pumping in extra resources did not promote universal improvement. It became necessary to be selective in allocation and to think more about the way in which resources, particularly teachers, should be used."[84]

The public expenditure cuts imposed by the Labour Government in the mid 1970s represented not only a response to the financial crisis facing the country, but also to the perceived failure of the education system to 'produce the goods'. As the Conservative Party set about devising a

strategy for breaking the mould of consensus politics and changing attitudes towards the public provision of services, so these attitudes were reflected at local government level. Local government services came under increasing pressure to justify their demands for increased resources or even for retaining their existing resource levels. In particular, neo-liberals were critical of the progressive teaching methods being adopted in many schools, of the insidious influence of the teacher associations upon the local authority budget and policy-making process, and of what they saw as a collapse of educational standards. O'Gorman says that *"the New Right burned with resentment at the disastrous consequences of a generation of consensus politics, of deals between big business, big unions and big government, of planning and high taxation. The spirit of independence and personal initiative upon which free enterprise depended had been almost fatally weakened by decades of welfare, bureaucracy and compromise. Economic ruin confronted the nation."*[55] All these criticisms were found in Oxfordshire where the Conservative Party contained a high proportion of 'philosophers' of the new school but also a high proportion of distinguished academics. Oxfordshire's enthusiasm for the private sector was reflected in the protection of the level of expenditure upon private education whilst the maintained sector suffered reductions in expenditure.

With the election of the Conservative Government in 1979 the neo-liberal thinking which had already begun to be applied to local government was directed to the welfare state. The adjustment was to prove difficult for the education service. However, at the time of the Oxfordshire dispute it was not the implementation of a full-scale experiment in neo-

liberalism which was being proposed. More, the neo-liberal critique had served to undermine confidence in the education service and had led an increasing number of Conservative councillors to believe that the time had come to assert their authority over the service which for so long, they were told, had been run as an almost autonomous part of the local authority whilst spending a large part of its resources. It was time for the elected representatives of the people to wrest control of the service from the self-serving 'professionals' and administrators.

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REFLECTIONS ON THE OXFORDSHIRE DISPUTE

During the course of this study several of the leading actors in the Oxfordshire dispute have explained their perceptions of events and motivations during 1976 and 1977. Some have declined to be interviewed, others have been unable to bring to mind any recollections at all, but the responses of those who have agreed to be interviewed or who have otherwise been prepared to give their account of events are contained in this chapter.

It must be remembered that these recollections are some 10 years after the event and that the passage of time, as well as the necessarily subjective nature of the responses, may cause us to question the validity of some of the points made. Nevertheless, these responses give us some insight into the perceptions of those most closely involved in the dispute and of the factors which influenced their actions at the time.

The Department of Education and Science

Shirley Williams, Secretary of State for Education and Science at the time, recalled little of the detail of the Oxfordshire dispute but her general recollections provide an interesting insight into the Department of Education and Science's attitude towards the dispute.

"I believe that at the time Oxfordshire was controlled by a very right-wing Conservative Chairman of the Education Committee who was anxious to

reduce the expenditure under Rate Support Grant in order to cut down the Oxfordshire rate. The Government of which I was a member had made it clear that they were in favour of some expansion of the teaching service at the margin in order to offset the effects of falling rolls, and that we had made provision in what was called an 'operating margin' of some 15,000 teachers over and above what would be necessary to maintain the then pupil:teacher ratio.

"I recall that we gave no support to Oxfordshire, and I believe that local advisers and HMIs took up the point with them, and as I recollect the outcome was a compromise in which Oxfordshire did not go ahead with a major reduction in its teaching force."

Clearly, Shirley Williams places responsibility for the dispute firmly at the door of the ruling Conservative group in Oxfordshire and their eagerness to reduce the level of rate increase. Nevertheless, the extent of her opposition to this policy would appear to have been her withholding of support for the authority's actions - an attitude which was characterised by some teachers' leaders as hypocritical.

THE UNIONS

The National Union of Teachers

Jack Stedman (Secretary, Oxfordshire Division)

It was clear from my discussion with Jack Stedman that he represented very much the 'traditional' NUT viewpoint. He had been an active NUT member throughout the post-war period and was a well-established and well respected figure within the Oxfordshire education service. It is clear that he had no particular political axe to grind although he was a Labour Party member at the commencement of the dispute. He placed himself politically on the Right of the Labour Party, as represented by Shirley Williams, Bill Rodgers and Tony Crosland. Significantly, he left the Labour Party following this dispute, primarily due to his disenchantment with the actions (or inaction) of Shirley Williams, then Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Stedman was the Secretary of the Oxford City Teachers' Association of the NUT (Oxford being a County Borough) prior to local government reorganisation and was a firm believer in partnership between the teacher associations and education officers for the benefit of the service. He expressed great concern at the increasingly political role which he believes has been adopted by the NUT since the early 1970s although he concedes that, to a degree, this was inevitable. When asked to describe his ideal Chief Education Officer, Stedman placed as his highest priority the ability to command respect - this was reflected in his defence of "the head of my service" when the CEO was under attack from other officers of the Authority.

A man of some foresight, he commented in his annual report to the Oxford City Teachers' Association in 1968 that the education service had reached a watershed and that teachers would need in future to come to

terms with managing a contracting service. His Association contained a significant and vocal minority who took exception to these remarks, believing that the Union should vigorously oppose all attempts to reduce spending on education. Stedman would appear to have been acutely aware throughout the 1960s and 1970s of the increasingly active role being taken by many left wing groupings within the NUT and this served, to an extent, as a backdrop to the Oxfordshire dispute.

Jack Stedman was the Secretary to the Council of Oxfordshire Teachers' Organisations and the Chairman of the Oxfordshire Trade Union Liaison Committee at the time of the dispute. He thus occupied an influential position vis-a-vis other teacher associations and local authority employees.

Prior to local government reorganisation Stedman had worked closely with the Chief Education Officer for Oxford, John Garne. It is clear that he viewed his relationship with Garne very much as one of partnership, with a mutual interest in resolving such problems as presented themselves. He was most satisfied with their working relationship which, in his view, was extremely effective within the context of a relatively compact geographical area and a comparatively consensual approach towards the education service among politicians of all parties.

Stedman viewed Garne as very much an administrator rather than a policy initiator. He describes Garne as scrupulously neutral in political terms, noting that he refused to attend Conservative group meetings when education issues were to be discussed. He would, in Stedman's view,

faithfully execute (albeit with reluctance on occasion) policy decisions taken by the politicians rather than take an active role in seeking to influence those decisions. Immediately prior to the dispute Stedman sought an interview with Garne and his deputy, Brian Day, in order to alert them to the strength of teacher feeling over the proposed cuts and to seek their assistance in avoiding conflict. Garne declined to intervene, saying that policy should be determined by elected members. It is clear that Stedman believes a more interventionist role from the Chief Education Officer might have avoided the prolonged dispute which eventually arose.

Clearly Stedman felt that the Chief Education Officer did not carry the authority nor command the respect among other senior officers of the County Council which was appropriate for the chief officer of the biggest spending service. The impression which Stedman gives of Garne's abilities was rather of an able administrator who was 'all at sea' in the new and highly politicised atmosphere of post-reorganisation local government. Given the nature of the Oxfordshire dispute it was therefore unlikely that the Chief Education Officer would be in a strong position to secure the additional resources required to ameliorate the problem.

Stedman believes that the Chief Executive, Brown, was a significant figure in the dispute. He describes Brown as a strident corporatist who was an extremely powerful figure within the Council. He attended Conservative group meetings and was, in Stedman's view, in tune with much of the nascent monetarist thought amongst Conservative politicians.

Nor were Stedman's relationships with N.U.T. colleagues always of mutual trust and confidence. In particular it is clear that there was some tension between Stedman and the Chairman of the NUT's national Action Committee, Max Morris. Stedman knew Morris to be a member of the Communist Party and clearly believed that Morris was influenced by local political activists within the NUT's ranks in Oxfordshire. On one occasion, Stedman claims, he threatened to resign from his position as the Secretary of Oxfordshire Division of the NUT and 'go public' when Morris authorised strike action in one school without first consulting Stedman.

As early as 1968 Jack Stedman had foreseen possible problems with the increasing pressure to reduce the level of expenditure upon the education service; he was aware in the summer of 1976 that teacher reaction to education cuts would be fierce. He had attempted to avert the crisis which he foresaw by meeting with the Chief Education Officer at the outset in order to convey this strength of feeling and to enlist the assistance of the head of the service in avoidance of potential difficulties. This attempt was not successful, Stedman believes, because the Chief Education Officer was not prepared to intervene directly in the policy-making process in the belief that this remained the prerogative of the politicians.

When £½ million was taken out of the education budget in mid 1976, Stedman saw this as a sign of things to come. When the £3½ million cut in the education budget was announced he felt that the proposals could be 'nipped in the bud' by prompt action on the part of the NUT. Stedman

believed, and managed to persuade the NUT at national level, that Oxfordshire was often in the vanguard of education cuts and that therefore a stand had to be made. This resulted in the half-day strike in September 1976.

In Jack Stedman's opinion the success of the call for half-day strike action stemmed as much from the effect of the cuts upon capitation allowances (the amount schools are allocated per pupil) as their effect upon teachers' jobs. Throughout the dispute teachers were accused of operating out of selfish motives but Stedman genuinely believes that much of the motivation was altruistic; in his view the main issue at stake was the actual number of teachers employed (and hence the pupil/teacher ratio) rather than the question of possible redundancies.

He readily concedes that the issue of education cuts had little noticeable effect upon the outcome of the 1977 County Council elections and this was despite the NUT establishing a sub-committee during the elections in order to promote and maintain interest in the education issue. However, in the elections held amongst the teaching force in Oxfordshire following the County Council elections the NUT managed to secure election for all its nominees and thereby filled all the available places for teacher representatives on the Oxfordshire Education Committee. This success he attributes to the N.U.T.'s resolute stand in defence of the education service within the County.

Stedman feels that he was successful in obtaining the support of all the local authority unions for the NUT's campaign but feels that, apart from

the successful inter-union half-day strike and rally in September 1976, little tangible was gained even from fellow teacher unions.

Once the threat of redundancies had been lifted on 31 August 1977, the campaign against the cuts lost momentum in Stedman's view. The commitment given by the Council at that point in time could, he believes, have been given at a much earlier stage and might thereby have reduced the severity of the action; he feels that the officers of the Authority must have known much earlier that the number of 'surplus' teachers would be very small by August 1977 but that the Authority's reluctance to guarantee 'no redundancies' prevented meaningful discussion on other related issues. By September 1977 many teachers felt that they had achieved all that was possible and so had little heart for further action; others wanted strike action to continue! The NUT locally had already decided to lift its ban on lunchtime supervision because of the effects of this form of action upon children, parental support and fellow TUC members employed in the school meals service; this move was bitterly resented by the Chairman of the NUT's national Action Committee, according to Stedman.

Ultimately, Stedman admits, the NUT was looking for a way to get itself 'off the hook' and the 50 secondments offered by the Authority to clinch a final settlement presented too good an opportunity to miss!

In assessing the impact of local government reorganisation upon the education service in Oxfordshire, Jack Stedman painted a picture of pre-reorganisation Oxfordshire (excluding for these purposes the city of

Oxford) as very much a paternalistic shire county, relatively non-political although conservative in general outlook. Despite its essentially conservative outlook Oxfordshire was, in his view, a relatively early convert to comprehensive education and a progressive approach in primary education. Oxford city, then an education authority, was far more dominated by party politics but essentially enjoyed a cosy relationship between education officers, councillors and teachers.

The addition of the more openly political former Berkshire districts introduced, in Stedman's view, a new breed of councillors who brought with them a more hostile attitude towards the progresive approach previously adopted within Oxford and Oxfordshire. Whereas the Chief Education Officers of Oxford and Oxfordshire had previously enjoyed a relatively free hand in running their respective services he feels that the Chief Education Officer of the 'new' Oxfordshire was "all at sea" in the new world of corporate management, and was therefore unable to exercise the degree of influence over policy-making or effectively defend his service when it came under attack from those committed to reducing expenditure levels.

Stedman sees the Oxfordshire dispute as part of a process by which teachers (and in particular those in membership of the National Union of Teachers) became increasingly 'militant' and 'political' during the 1960s. He points to the 90%+ vote in favour of strike action in Oxford city schools in 1968 and the strike action which took place in 1969 in Oxford - on both occasions on the pay issue - as signalling a major transformation of teacher attitudes at this time. He believes that the

1976-77 dispute did lead to the NUT being taken more seriously within Oxfordshire and claims that the threat of action resolved problems with class sizes in Oxfordshire schools on a number of occasions after the dispute.

John Gray (National President)

John Gray was installed as national President of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) at Easter 1977. His contribution towards resolving the Oxfordshire dispute is recalled with admiration by both his NUT colleagues and their adversaries at Oxfordshire County Council.

He clearly viewed the Oxfordshire dispute in national terms, believing that if Oxfordshire's practice of placing teachers upon fixed-term contracts and then reducing teacher numbers by not renewing these contracts was allowed to succeed, then other authorities would have been encouraged to adopt such measures. As with all his NUT colleagues, John Gray believed that the primary issue in the dispute was the threat to pupil/teacher ratios, although he concedes that the protection of those teachers employed on fixed-term contracts was also a priority.

In his view Oxfordshire was a hard line Council and he considered that the Chairman of the Education Committee at the start of the dispute (Councillor Cross) was not in a very strong position within his party. His replacement by Brigadier Roger Streatfield following the 1977 County Council elections meant that the Education Committee now had a Chairman who was a much stronger figure in the Conservative Party and who had

apparently much more influence over the leader of the Council. Furthermore, the NUT interpreted other changes in the ranks of the Council's negotiating team as representing a weakening of the position of the 'hawks' following the County Council elections.

Perhaps significantly, Gray stresses the importance of his meeting alone with the Chairman of the Education Committee at the meeting which finally brought the dispute to an end. *"He and I met alone and hammered out the final details without the danger of provocative remarks which can come out in a large meeting. After two or three of these attempts, after each of which we reported to our panels, both sides met and the agreement was made."*

John Gray's view of the role of the Secretary of State was that Shirley Williams had intervened as far as she was able though she was aware of the legal constraints on a Secretary of State and the difficulty arising when Government and local authority are of different political parties.

The Assistant Masters' and Mistresses' Association

The Secretary of the Oxfordshire Branch of the Assistant Masters' and Mistresses' Association (AMMA) at the time of the Oxfordshire dispute was Mrs. Eileen Gould.

According to Mrs. Gould, prior to the Oxfordshire dispute AMMA *"had spent much time in looking at examinations, resources, pilot schemes etc. but not at all at conditions of service, this was something you*

just accepted. With the coming of reorganisation members began to worry about how they would cope but as an Association we were very much behind the other Associations in agitating for better P.T.R.[pupil/teacher ratios]." AMMA, she says, was *"geared in to being a Professional Association looking at the broader aspects of education rather than an Association for the protection of the individual. Rates of pay and conditions of service were just not talked about."*

Nevertheless, AMMA members were involved in the dispute and sought to influence the policy-makers in their own way. As the Secretary of AMMA in Oxfordshire, Mrs. Gould was involved in consultations with the Chief Education Officer along with the secretaries of the other teacher associations and she recalls that it was always possible for the teachers to make their case quite clear to the CEO and his officers. However *"It was not quite so easy to approach the elected members"* she says.

The General Secretary of AMMA encouraged members in Oxfordshire to make representations to their local county councillors, and as the Secretary for Oxfordshire, Mrs. Gould wrote to the Chairman and all the members of the Education Committee. The only direct involvement in the disruption of the service came when towards the end of the dispute AMMA members withdrew from schools for an afternoon meeting.

Alan Pennington(HAS/UWT)

According to Pennington (a member of the NAS/UWT National Executive at the time) the National Executive of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teacherw was originally lukewarm about supporting the half day strike action called for 21 September 1976 in opposition to the proposed cuts in education expenditure in Oxfordahire. Nevertheless it was agreed that the Union would take part in the strike action in order to show unity with their trade union colleagues.

A reluctance to participate in strike action characterised the NAS/UWT's approach towards the dispute. They believed that strike action would simply have the effect of 'putting money into the Authority's pocket' which would have resulted in teachers funding improved expenditure themselves. However, the Union undertook other forms of disruptive action including refusal to cover for absent colleagues, an action which they commenced on 20 September 1976.

The NAS/UWT shared the same objective in the dispute as their colleagues in the NUT; both saw their primary aim as preventing the proposed worsening of the pupil/teacher ratio. They also shared the view that the Oxfordshire cuts were very much a 'dry run' for cuts elsewhere in the country. Pennington says that he and many of his colleagues believed that the Conservative Party in Oxfordshire was being orchestrated by Conservative Central Office at the time and that this explains their hard line attitude.

Pennington also believes that the local negotiating and consultative machinery was insufficiently well established by the time of the dispute to resolve the dispute at an early stage.

The Association of County Councils

Gordon Cunningham, Education Officer of the Association of County Councils (ACC) disclaims any suggestion that the Oxfordshire dispute might have been resolved as a result of the intervention of the ACC. *"Our role"* he says *"was quite simply to enable the various parties concerned to find a way to meet together under an independent chairman to talk through the issues and - if they could - reach a successful conclusion. We took no part in the talks themselves."*

OXFORDSHIRE EDUCATION AUTHORITY

John Garne, Chief Education Officer

Prior to local government reorganisation in 1973-74 John Garne was the Chief Education Officer for the city of Oxford - he was 58 years of age when the 'new' Oxfordshire County Council began its work in 1974. He claims not to have considered the possibility of early retirement in 1974 although he is aware that extremely favourable terms would have been available to him at the time of reorganisation. Had he not been successful in obtaining the appointment as Oxfordshire's new Chief Education Officer then he says that he would have continued to serve in whatever capacity had been deemed appropriate by the new Authority. Clearly one of his prime motivations in continuing to work within the

new Authority was his desire to protect the Oxford city education service from a possible 'levelling down' of provision following the reorganisation.

Shortly after the dispute John Garne retired at the age of 62. He denies that this was as a result of disenchantment with the effects of reorganisation, saying that he had always intended to retire once he had completed 40 years of pensionable service.

Garne made no secret of his distaste for political manoevering and the rigours of corporate management; he recalled with considerable pleasure the contact which he had with teachers and his visits to schools, particularly during hist time at Oxford when he covered relatively few schools in a compact geographical area, and it would seem that it was this aspect of his work which most appealed to him. The remote fastness of the new County Hall held little appeal for a man who was used to resolving problems directly with the individuals concerned be they parents, teachers or councillors. Nor did he enjoy his involvement in the financial intricacies of his work, preferring instead to leave this aspect of his Department's work to his deputy, Brian Day. Garne was obviously very much an 'education first, finance second' man who is still at a loss to understand how anyone could believe that a reduction in the size of the teaching force could be simply administered! When he was discussing the practical effects upon individual schools Garne demonstrated much greater enthusiasm than when he was discussing the size of the overall cuts.

During his years as the Chief Education Officer for the city of Oxford, John Garne felt that relations with teachers, union representatives, councillors and parents were quite informal with much emphasis upon resolving problems over a cup of coffee. The Borough had about 70 schools and 700 teachers. He believes that relationships within pre-reorganisation Oxfordshire were also of this informal nature.

Interestingly, the Town Clerk during Garne's time at Oxford was perceived by him to be anxious to gain control over the work of the education committee even at that time, although Garne claims to have successfully resisted these encroachments upon the autonomy of the service. However it was the self-same Town Clerk who was appointed Chief Executive of the new Oxfordshire County Council - a Treasurer by background who was, in Garne's opinion, unsympathetic to the highest spending service, viewing educational considerations as very much secondary to financial constraints.

The reorganisation of local government brought about profound changes for the education service. Many of the new councillors were inexperienced in local government and few had any experience as education committee members. The councillors became subject to strict Party control and the Conservative group was dominated by a small clique, in Garne's opinion. The Leader of the Conservative group was Francis, an ex-chairman of Berkshire's education committee; Francis became almost a full-time local government worker once leader of the Conservative group. Francis, Redwood, Hatch and Bogdanor dominated the group and were seen by John Garne as disciples of the 'new right'.

With reorganisation came the extension of the corporate arms of the Council into the work of the Education Department. Rather than the Education Department itself providing the secretariat for the Education Committee and its sub-committees, the County Secretary's Department took over this role. Not only did this change have a direct bearing upon the administrative arrangements for such meetings (preparation of agenda, minutes etc.) but it also hindered attempts to arrange informal 'ad hoc' meetings between education officers and teacher association representatives since these 'outsiders' would also seek to involve themselves in such meetings. Garne feels that this change in itself represented an enormous loss of control for the Chief Education Officer.

Formalisation of the consultative process, the development of strong Party discipline and the eager use by the Chief Executive of the machinery of corporate management resulted in a considerable restriction on the Chief Education Officer's room for manoevre. It is clear that John Garne did not have an easy relationship with either the Chief Executive or the Leader of the Conservative Group, and one suspects that he therefore exerted little influence upon them.

These problems came, of course, on top of the difficulties which might otherwise have been anticipated with the merger of two separate authorities and the expansion of Oxfordshire's borders. As previously mentioned, Garne was anxious to remain within the service in order to 'protect' educational provision within the city of Oxford, but he was also conscious of a concern throughout the new County that particular areas might be neglected. He believes that there was little confidence

in the new authority among parents and teachers, and an important aspect of his work was to ensure a 'balance' and to reassure people that they would not be disadvantaged as a result of either geographical location or lack of political influence. He clearly regrets the inevitable impersonal style consequent upon a reorganisation which produced such a massive entity as the new Oxfordshire.

Unlike certain others, John Garne does not believe that the councillors from the ex-Berkshire areas were qualitatively different from their Oxfordshire counterparts; he does believe, however, that the reorganisation resulted in a new breed of politician in local government.

Garne did not have a very sharp recollection of the precise details of the dispute itself, particularly over the financial aspects. He could, however, clearly recall the very hard line attitude taken by the elected members and it is apparent that he considers their intransigence to have played a significant part in preventing an earlier resolution of the problem. In particular he clearly believes that a settlement was possible at the meeting of 29 April 1977 when, in his view, the NUT had moved their position a considerable way in order to secure a settlement. He paid tribute to the negotiating skill and attitude of NUT National President, John Gray, and gave the strong impression that between the two of them they would have settled the whole dispute there and then.

Garne takes personal responsibility for the decision to offer fixed-term contracts to so many Oxfordshire teachers in 1976 and it was clearly a

decision which gave him no great pleasure. His main justification for their use was that many of the part-time teachers in particular lived in rural Oxfordshire, or had transport problems, and so could not be flexibly deployed to other schools when numbers of pupils fell in their schools. He claimed to have been unaware of the legal implications of terminating the employment of teachers on such contracts (indeed he was somewhat critical of CLEA vacillation over this question) but that, in any event, he had no intention of using such contracts in a draconian manner. When pressed, Garne agreed that he would have been happy to give a commitment at an early stage of continued employment to almost all of these teachers. The influence of corporate management, however, prevented him from giving an assurance to the NUT which might have avoided the escalation of the dispute to the level of strike action.

Both with the £¼ million cut from the 1976/77 budget (mid-term) and the £3¼ million cut from the 1977/78 budget the size of the cut was determined without reference to the Education Department or Committee. Although the Chief Executive and County Treasurer had both sought to introduce 'proper' corporate management, this had been resisted and the administration of the cuts was left to the Education Committee. Every attempt was made to protect the teaching force from the cuts but the cumulative effect of this policy by 1977 was that the fabric of the service was under enormous strain and the administrative services had also been reduced to a level where much paperwork simply could not be completed.

Since the inception of the new County Council it had pursued a policy of financial stringency in order to minimise rate increases, with certain influential councillors advocating zero-growth budgets in cash terms! In Garne's view they brought upon themselves the problem of the cut in their rate support grant since they had simply reduced the base from which calculations would be made.

Garne believes that a strong anti-education bias existed among many councillors and this was matched by great hostility towards the NUT itself. Garne himself does not criticise the conduct of the NUT during the dispute, although he is less benevolent towards the local representatives of certain other teacher unions.

It would appear that the Association of County Councils refused to back Oxfordshire's position during the dispute. From the Authority's point of view the DES also refused to involve themselves in a constructive way in order to resolve the dispute.

Olive Gibbs

Olive Gibbs was the leader of the Labour Group on Oxfordshire County Council at the time of the dispute. Prior to local government reorganisation she had led the Labour Group on Oxford City Council but had decided to devote her energies towards the County Council following reorganisation since it was at this level that the two services which most interested her, education and the social services, were to be administered. She was a dominant force within the local Labour Party

during the 1970s and widely respected throughout the local political scene.

Olive Gibbs was strongly opposed to local government reorganisation on the grounds that it would make local government more remote from the electorate and because she felt that it would strengthen the position of the unelected Chief Executive. She sees her initial judgement as being vindicated by the powerful position established by Oxfordshire's Chief Executive and his dominance of elected members.

As the leader of the Labour Group on Oxfordshire County Council Olive Gibbs was a member of the Policy and Resources Committee along with the leader of the Liberal Group and the Chairs of all the Committees.

Her recollection of the local Labour Party's attitude towards the dispute is one of fierce opposition to the effects of the then Labour Government's economic policies upon local services in Oxfordshire; this recollection is borne out by local media coverage at the time. She claims to have made representations at national level on behalf of Oxfordshire Labour Party and therefore she felt fully justified in opposing all the cuts imposed by the Council. Despite the Labour Party's minority position on the Council she is proud of having achieved, with the assistance of several Conservatives (including the Council Chair, Bob Weir) the restoration of a 4p rate in 1977 which went some way towards lessening the impact of the proposed cuts.

Olive Gibbs is particularly bitter about the role played by the then Secretary of State for Education in the Oxfordshire dispute. She accuses Shirley Williams of saying one thing to Oxfordshire representatives and something completely different in Parliament and to the public at large. Gibbs believes that Shirley Williams may have been secretly pleased at the extent to which Oxfordshire County Council was cutting back upon its expenditure.

Although the Labour Party supported the public campaign against the expenditure cuts in Oxfordshire, it achieved a poor showing in the 1977 County Council elections. This Olive Gibbs puts down entirely to the national trend against the Government, noting with regret that local issues would appear to have so little impact upon local election results.

Brian Day

Brian Day was the Deputy Chief Education Officer for Oxfordshire at the time of the Oxfordshire dispute. Prior to local government reorganisation he had been the Deputy Chief Education Officer for the 'old' Oxfordshire County Council. Following the retirement of John Garne shortly after the dispute Day applied for the vacant position of Chief Education Officer but was unsuccessful; he was still the Deputy Chief Education Officer at the time of my meeting with him.

Day is a man of strong opinions who is fundamentally opposed to strike action. Initially he indicated that he did not believe that the strike

action taken by the teachers during the Oxfordshire dispute had been of any real significance, saying that the real issue was the failure of the appropriate consultative machinery to resolve the dispute; later, however, he was to admit that it was probably the threat of renewed strike action which prompted the Council to make an improved offer to the teachers in late August 1977.

Brian Day had a strong recollection of the detail of the Oxfordshire dispute and confirmed the recollection of his former Chief Education Officer, John Garne, that it was Day who dealt with the financial aspects of the problem as far as the Education Department was concerned. In Day's opinion he was a good and experienced negotiator at the time of the dispute.

Day claims to have been a convert to the cause of corporate management well before the reorganisation of the local government service in 1973-74 and he clearly retains a firm commitment to this approach. He sees corporate management as being a means by which the County Council itself can secure its right to determine the policies adopted by each spending committee. He was quite pleased by the 'fact' that he had managed to pull the wool over the eyes of the County Treasurer on more than one occasion in the interests of his service, but felt that as an Officer of the Authority he must act strictly in accordance with the dictates of the Council when these are clearly expressed. He could see nothing inappropriate in the Council imposing cuts on the education budget with little consultation.

Although a supporter of corporate management techniques, Day claims to have opposed attempts by the Chief Executive's office to convene and clerk Education Committee (and sub-committee) meetings.

Day indicated that, in his view, the teacher representatives on the Education Committee and on the Teachers' Joint Consultative Committee argued eloquently and forcefully against the expenditure cuts in the period up to 1976. The cuts for 1977-78 were, in Day's view, determined well in advance of the Rate Support Grant settlement in November 1976. The Education Department had been asked to prepare papers outlining the effects of the cuts at various levels, prior to the decision in 1976. The threat to jobs was real and was a consequence of the policy decision to reduce the pupil/teacher ratios; there was therefore no way in which the Council would guarantee the continued employment of any teacher.

The key to the dispute, according to Day, was the Authority's view that its right to manage must be upheld. For this reason informal approaches from the teacher associations and others were doomed to fail. Since the question of the 'right to manage' was seen as being of fundamental importance there was little room for manoevre on the part of Education Officers. The policy decision was clear; the number of teaching posts must be reduced in order to effect the necessary savings and no-one could be allowed to challenge this decision successfully.

The decision on the extent of the cuts in the education service was taken by the Policy and Resources Committee and by the full Council, based upon papers produced by the Education Department. It would seem

that little resistance came from Brian Day and other Education Officers once the level of the cuts had been determined.

When asked about the 30 teaching posts funded by savings identified in the budget, Day says that this was a matter of genuine misunderstanding between the Authority and the Unions. The Authority, he says, had never intended that these posts would be saved beyond April 1978 since such a commitment would have been viewed as an abrogation of the Council's right to manage its own affairs by tying its hands for the future. He accepts that the Unions genuinely believed that the commitment extended beyond April 1978.

It is clear that Day does not feel that the Secretary of State for Education and Science was at all helpful during the dispute other than in attempting to bring the parties together. Nor does he feel that parental pressure had much impact upon the course of the dispute although he feels that parental awareness of education issues was increased at the time.

According to Day the main lesson of the dispute was the failure of the disputes procedure to resolve the problem, since after the failure to agree locally upon any recommendations to resolve the dispute there was no national procedure. He believes that the possibility of such an impasse had never been considered, and that if this had been considered a possibility matters would never have reached the stage which they ultimately did. He indicated that as a result of the experience gained in 1977 such a situation would not be permitted to occur today.

Day believes that the dispute was eventually settled because no-one could see any other way out of the impasse! When pressed he conceded that industrial action, and the threat of further action, must have contributed to the pressure upon the Authority to settle the dispute. Another factor which he believes was significant in the eventual resolution of this problem was the change of personnel following the 1977 County Council elections.

John Francis

John Francis was the leader of Oxfordshire County Council's ruling Conservative Group during the Oxfordshire education dispute in 1976-77. Prior to local government reorganisation in 1973-74 he had been a County Councillor in Berkshire since the 1950s, initially serving as an Independent but since the late 1960s/early 1970s as a Conservative. Immediately prior to his 'transfer' into the new County of Oxfordshire, Francis had been Chairman of Berkshire's Education Committee.

The description which Francis gave of pre-reorganisation Oxfordshire County Council accords fully with the stereotype of a shire county; run by the landed gentry, elected largely as independents, under the benevolently dictatorial rule of Lord Macclesfield as Chairman of the Council. The Authority was dominated by its biggest spending committee, the Education Committee, which according to Francis was dominated in turn by the teacher representatives and therefore relatively free spending.

Francis and his colleagues on Berkshire County Council had begun to organise themselves politically immediately prior to local government reorganisation since, he says, they recognised the importance of party political control in the proposed new structure. Tim Brighouse, later Oxfordshire's Chief Education Officer, maintains that there was a more immediate concern for Francis since he was supposedly told " *that if he wished to remain as Chairman of the Education Committee [in Berkshire] he'd better join the Conservative Group."' In particular, Francis could foresee problems with the incorporation of the city of Oxford into the new Oxfordshire County Council and feared that a well organised Labour Group might dominate an unorganised Conservative Group. The pre-reorganisation Oxfordshire councillors were clearly, according to Francis, innocents in the matter of party politics and this was later to be reflected in problems within the Conservative Group. Furthermore, in the 1973 County Council elections the majority of county councillors elected from the 'old' Oxfordshire were inexperienced in County Council affairs, certainly in comparison with those from the newly incorporated area which had formerly been in Berkshire. Francis regrets the passing of aldermen from local government life and feels that they would have been particularly useful in the immediate aftermath of reorganisation.*

According to Francis both the Chairman of the 'new' County Council, Bob Weir, and the Chairman of the Education Committee, Cross, were out of tune with the highly politicised and corporate nature of the new authority. Both, apparently, left local politics because "they couldn't stand us [Francis and his political allies] *any longer"* and it is clear that neither carried much influence within the Council.

Under the influence of the Chief Executive, Alan Brown, the new Council intended to adopt a fully corporate management approach through the Policy and Resources Committee; Francis does not believe that they succeeded in this although they did clearly make strides in this direction. It is clear that Brown was a very influential figure in the early days of the new Authority and that his Treasurer's background was extremely significant.

Francis made no secret of the fact (indeed he was quite proud) that Oxfordshire, under his leadership, led the way in local government expenditure cuts from the earliest days of the new Council. This he attributes to the new radical conservatism of many of the councillors, combined with the enthusiasm of the new Chief Executive. The most dramatic change of emphasis was the reversal of the budgetary process from one of building up a budget from the lowest level (e.g. nursery provision) and then pruning the end result, to a process of examining the budget in terms of applying a certain level of expenditure cuts from the outset.

Although Francis was keen to implicate the Government in the problems consequent upon the need to reduce expenditure he readily admitted that Oxfordshire had already embarked on its policy of cutting expenditure, and that the Government's cuts in 1976 served only to accelerate this trend. Indeed, Francis claims to have told Association of County Councils' representatives much earlier that where Oxfordshire led others would eventually follow, albeit prompted by the Government. Oxfordshire's cuts were primarily intended to reduce the rate burden but

it was also part of a more general feeling that public expenditure was getting out of control. There were certainly idealists among the Conservative ranks, John Redwood for example, and their economic theories seem to have been symptomatic of nascent Thatcherism - according to Francis, however, *"Redwood was on a different plane to the rest of us"*.

John Francis certainly agrees that the tenor of the 'Great Debate' and the general climate of the time was that education had failed to deliver the goods in terms of economic performance. The view of Francis and his colleagues was that the education service had expanded so rapidly and dramatically because the teaching profession was always asking for more and always getting its own way. The privileged position of teachers as co-opted members of the Education Committee often did not reflect the interests of the Council as a whole yet would be difficult to overturn. Teaching the education service the lessons of corporate management was clearly seen by Francis as quite important.

Francis also concedes that many councillors, himself included, felt that the teacher/pupil ratio was far less important than the quality of the teaching, and that classes much larger than those found in Oxfordshire at the time of the dispute were satisfactorily taught in the past. They were therefore unable to comprehend the extent of the concern over adding only another two pupils to each class. Added to this was a widespread reaction amongst councillors against progressive primary education as practised in Oxfordshire (and blamed upon the undue influence of the teaching profession), with some of the Conservative

Group favouring the reintroduction of selective education; Francis would not countenance the latter course of action.

When asked about the possibility of closing small rural schools (of which he admitted Oxfordshire had an excessive number) Francis said that although everyone could see the logic of this it would have been an electoral disaster for any councillor for an area in which a school was closed. There were so many small rural schools in Oxfordshire that a significant number of councillors took the view that a school closure elsewhere might presage an attempt to close a school within their own electoral division; the Authority therefore effectively precluded this policy option from serious consideration.

Francis certainly believes that the National Union of Teachers was the leading force in the dispute as the largest and, at that time, most militant teachers' union. He saw the dispute very much in terms of settling with the NUT in the belief that the other unions would then follow.

Although he accused the NUT's Divisional Secretary, Jack Stedman, of speaking differently in public than he had privately, he conceded that the NUT leadership in Oxfordshire was under considerable pressure from its membership to resist the Authority's proposals. He, too, claimed to be something of a hostage to the 'backwoodsmen' in the ranks of the Conservative Group. He claims that Brigadier Roger Streatfield was one of the most vociferous supporters of the hard line approach until he became the Chairman of the Education Committee!

There was never, according to Francis, any intention of making teachers redundant since he felt that the threat alone would be sufficient to make teachers co-operate with redeployment which, combined with natural wastage, would reduce teacher numbers to the required levels. There is no doubt that the Conservative Group viewed the actions of the teachers as a challenge to the Council's right to manage its own budget.

Francis believes that the weakness of Cross (Chairman of Education until May 1977) and Garne (Chief Education Officer) contributed towards the Authority's problems since they were so easily dominated by others. He agrees that the appointment of Streatfield gave the teacher associations greater confidence that any deal made with him would stick. He concedes that there was great parental pressure to resolve the dispute and clearly feared that the Conservatives could lose control of Oxfordshire in May 1977; their success he attributes to national trends. It was the threat of continuing disruption of the service which eventually caused the Authority to seek a compromise settlement.

Conclusion

What, then do these recollections tell us about the Oxfordshire dispute? When challenged for an explanation of the reason for the dispute reaching the proportions it did it is noticeable that the teacher union representatives and education officers take a similar view. They point to inadequacies in the consultative and disputes procedures, possibly due to the novelty of the post-local government reorganisation procedures. It is as though the 'professionals', teachers and

administrators alike, saw the dispute as an aberration, an interruption to the normally smooth process of decision-making through consensus and partnership; the relationship is not questioned, only the procedures. Indeed, the Deputy Chief Education Officer went so far as to say that with the greater experience of the procedures which had now been gained the dispute could not occur today.

Yet behind this explanation of the problems of resolving the dispute lie indications of deeper and more long-term problems with the relationship between teachers and their employers which were also reflected in the relationship between councillors and education officers. The Union/Authority interface is normally at the level of Union County Secretary and Chief Education Officer; in Oxfordshire following local government reorganisation the County Secretary for the National Union of Teachers and the Chief Education Officer had considerable experience of dealing with one another having previously held equivalent posts within Oxford Borough Council. Their mutual experience had been one of jointly resolving problems often on an informal basis and both appeared to have been somewhat taken aback at the proportions reached by the 1976-77 dispute.

It is clear that education officers were all too well aware of the threat to the relative autonomy of the education service in the 'new' Oxfordshire. Both the Chief Education Officer and his Deputy referred to attempts by the Chief Executive to take over secretariat duties for the Education Committee and its sub-committees; this was seen as a direct challenge to the role of the Chief Education Officer and his officers.

The Union, too, was made aware of the pressure being exerted by the Chief Executive to gain greater influence over the work of the Education Department. The Chief Executive was perceived as being very close to leading members of the ruling Conservative group and there is no doubt that he was extremely influential in the development of the policies and strategies of the new County Council.

The views of councillors, education officers and union representatives clearly indicate that the period following local government reorganisation was one of increased tension between each of the parties. The Chief Executive and leading councillors were anxious to curb the autonomy of the education service (and in particular the influence of the teacher unions), the education officers were anxious to ward off the intrusive demands of the corporate management policy, and the teachers could see their long-established influence over the policy-making process being undermined.

At the same time a combination of the nation's economic difficulties and an increasing awareness of the significance of trade union links and industrial organisation brought about a more assertive attitude amongst teachers. This attitude was characterised by many local politicians as an increasingly militant and political approach towards educational issues which some saw as an attempt to wrest control away from elected councillors altogether! Certainly it would appear that the local leadership of the National Union of Teachers was often placed in a situation whereby they were driven on by pressure from grass roots activists, but the leadership remained eminently amenable to compromise

solutions to the problem and could in no way be seen as excessively militant in themselves.

The increased assertiveness of teachers by the mid 1970s was matched in Oxfordshire by the increasingly critical attitude taken by local politicians to the public services in general and the influence of public servants such as teachers and social workers over the direction of their services in particular. With the reorganisation of local government these politicians were to see an opportunity to reassert the primacy of elected members in the policy-making process with a consequent restriction of the privileged position hitherto enjoyed by their employees.

There is no disputing that Oxfordshire was badly hit by the Government's Rate Support Grant settlement at the time of the dispute. This forced the Council to face harsh decisions on the level of services to be provided and rates to be levied. It also provided an opportunity to demonstrate that elected members would determine the policy objectives of the Authority. The attempt to reverse the Authority's decisions on spending cuts therefore came to be viewed as a challenge to the councillors' right to manage the Authority - this was to make compromise extremely difficult to achieve.

With central government apparently taking little real interest in the outcome of the dispute, and intervention at that level would almost certainly have been decisive in the circumstances, then it was left to the respective parties to exercise their powers in the public arena

before reaching an acceptable solution to the problem. In the time-honoured, pragmatic British fashion the outcome left both sides publicly claiming to have achieved their objectives and privately resolving never to get into such a mess again!

References

1. Politicising the Manager or Managing the Politicians?, T.Brighouse in Education Management and Administration 1988 p.98.

CONCLUSION

The Oxfordshire dispute presents a practical example of pressure group activity in attempting to influence the policy-making process. In this respect the availability of primary source material in the form of contemporary documentation, as well as the willingness of certain key figures in the dispute to share their insights into events provided a sound basis for a study of the practical realities of policy-making and pressure group activity. The original focus of the study aimed at identifying critical points in the dispute when policy outcomes might have been altered; it sought also to evaluate the strategy and tactics adopted by the National Union of Teachers in the hope that this might highlight their effectiveness in influencing the policy-makers.

Of course, by restricting the study to only one specific case it is not necessarily possible to draw conclusions which will be of more general applicability. To the extent that the Oxfordshire dispute represents a unique combination of circumstances and personalities, a conclusion that a particular negotiating position at a specific meeting would have significantly altered the course of events might have no validity beyond the context of this particular situation. The purpose of studying the various theoretical approaches to the policy-making process is to assess whether they can help us to view events in a way such that lessons of more general applicability may be drawn from the detail of this dispute. In turn, theoretical approaches should enable us to view the course of the dispute within a framework which brings to seemingly unstructured

events a pattern which reveals the forces in operation and the processes underpinning the actions of those involved in the dispute.

The systems approach to the policy-making process expressly includes sub-systems within its field of analysis. It purports to identify features which are common to the process at whatever level decisions are to be made and therefore should be directly applicable to the events of the Oxfordshire dispute. If the system of local government in Oxfordshire is viewed as a policy-making sub-system then it is possible to identify those processes and features which match the systems theorists' analysis. The 'system' as such is manifested in the institutions, procedures, processes, structures and values which constitute the local government of Oxfordshire. The system in this case is sustained not merely through internal factors but also, as a result of its place in the overall structure of government and administration, through external power relationships. The greater threat to the survival of the sub-system must be that from the intervention of central government in response to a lack of compliance on the part of the local authority rather than from internal tensions and pressure, but it is a threat which would only be contemplated in an extreme crisis.

Such external support as provided by central government does not however extend to the ruling regime within the local government system. The ruling Conservative group on Oxfordshire County Council would certainly have been concerned to ensure an appropriate level of diffuse and specific support in order to retain their position of authority. During the course of the dispute within the education service there is clear

evidence that the ruling group feared the impact of the dispute upon a section of the electorate. Steps were taken to minimise this loss of support through publicity which drew attention to the alleged intransigence of the teachers, statements which were included with rate demands which claimed that the reduction in education spending would not lead to teachers being sacked and through references to the need to reduce spending in order to avoid excessive rate increases. In contrast the National Union of Teachers sought to turn the question of education cuts into an electoral issue in the hope that this would either bring about a revision of the Authority's policy as the ruling group sought to retain support, or that the electorate would be so persuaded as to elect a new Council in May 1977 which would reverse the policy of spending cuts.

In the event, the ruling regime took the view that the level of general support which their policy of expenditure restraint would engender made it unnecessary to allocate additional resources to education with a view to avoiding a loss of specific support. The County Council elections in May 1977 demonstrated that little, if any, erosion of support for the regime had resulted from pressure group activity on the specific issue of education cuts. That the election results closely mirrored national trends might be construed as evidence that within the local government system less significance need be placed upon the generation and maintenance of support within the system. Nevertheless, the actions of the ruling Conservative group as well as the recollection of the Leader of the Council demonstrate that the policy-makers themselves considered

that local outputs and outcomes would have a significant impact upon their prospects of re-election.

Systems theory also emphasises the role of pressure groups as the 'gatekeepers' of the policy-making process. In this role they serve the function of regulating the inputs to the process, converting the diverse wants of their members into a coherent body of demands which are capable of being met through specific outpots. In the context of the Oxfordshire dispute one is therefore led to question the role performed by the National Union of Teachers in this respect. What is clear from the study is that the ruling group on the Council perceived the N.U.T.'s attitude throughout as a challenge to the Council's right to determine the level of its expenditure and its priorities. There is little doubt that any such approach is likely to be deemed by those responsible for policy-making as a challenge to the system itself and an illegitimate role for a pressure group to play. Until the final stages of the dispute the N.U.T. retained a policy of total opposition to the cuts, refusing to identify priorities for the Union (such as the retention of jobs) which might have enabled the Authority to meet the Union's demands whilst remaining within their expenditure targets.

With hindsight it would appear that had the Union been prepared to regulate the wants of its members at an early stage and then concentrated upon its principal objective then a settlement might have been reached much sooner. As it was, the need to generate and maintain parental support meant that the Union was required to campaign on such a broad front that the regime formed the view that no output short of

capitulation on the budget would resolve the problem. Faced with such a situation they preferred to risk the loss of specific support on this particular issue in order that their other support-engendering priorities might be maintained.

Systems theory has thus highlighted important aspects of the political and policy-making processes within Oxfordshire at the time of the dispute. It is not appropriate to question whether the system itself required or generated particular outputs in order to ensure its continuation, for the system was never threatened. The regime, however, clearly perceived a threat to its position and was required as a consequence to consider measures which would ensure the maintenance of both its authority and its support. The prospect of continuing disturbance to the system in the form of on-going industrial action by the teachers (albeit in a limited form) ultimately led the County Council to reach an accommodation on teacher numbers which represented an increase in the planned level of resourcing for education. A study of the Oxfordshire dispute does not (and could not) confirm the validity of systems theory as a tool for analysing the policy-making process. It does however highlight specific aspects of that process and assists a critical analysis of the role of the National Union of Teachers in particular.

A Marxist view of the policy-making process places great emphasis upon the contradictions which are inherent within and between the social and economic structures of a capitalist society. The institutions of government at national and local level seek to manage these

contradictions in such a way that the economic order is not threatened. To an extent the Marxist view may be seen as similar to systems theory, placing greater emphasis upon the need to protect and promote a particular economic system and upon the significance of the supposedly inevitable contradictions within the system. Both approaches recognise that sub-systems develop a degree of autonomy - indeed for the Marxist approach this autonomy represents a significant potential source of tension and contradiction.

At its most fundamental level the Marxist view of the Oxfordshire dispute would emphasise the conflict between the need to satisfy the aspirations engendered by the ethos and values which sustain and promote the education service, and the economic measures required in order to ensure the survival of the economic order. Thus, when the nation's economic performance began to place significant strains upon the private sector, the order was sent out from central government that local government expenditure be reduced. It is the task of the political system to manage the tensions which will inevitably be created in the process of redirecting resources towards the manufacturing sector of the economy. In the case of the education service the tension is always likely to be particularly acute since the service promotes its own value system which emphasises the benefit to the nation and the individual of a well resourced education system. Parental and teacher aspirations and a widespread belief in the right to a decent education are always likely to lead to determined resistance to cuts in the level of resources available to the education service.

A Marxist evaluation of the policy-making process thus serves to highlight contradictions and tensions which policy-makers are charged with managing. Certainly a case can be made for the proposition that it was such a process which manifested itself in Oxfordshire in 1976 and 1977. However, the question must remain why did such a dispute arise in Oxfordshire but not in other local education authorities at the same period in time? No doubt a case can be made that Oxfordshire was among the local authorities worst affected by the central government decision to redistribute its rate support grant in favour of urban authorities at the expense of rural authorities. This decision to reallocate rate support may also be seen as a response to national economic circumstances but the fact remains that Oxfordshire was only among the worst affected authorities. In reality the decision to cut education expenditure so drastically was not driven simply by economic imperatives - it was driven equally by a perception on the part of certain Oxfordshire politicians that education was not providing value for money and that the value might be improved by reducing the cost.

That sub-systems can and do develop a degree of autonomy within the social and economic infrastructure of the nation is a significant aspect of Marxist theory. Such autonomy not only serves to create contradictions and also acts as a means of managing contradictions on occasion. To the extent that the education service develops a degree of autonomy it might increase the difficulty of imposing policies of expenditure reductions, but on the other hand the relative autonomy of local education services produces a range of solutions to the problem and thus serves to diffuse resistance to an unpopular measure. As each

local authority approaches the problem in a different way so it will generate different responses, deflecting attention from the primary source of the problem.

Within the framework of a Marxist analysis it is therefore appropriate to allow for local factors to influence the course of events. The attitude of local politicians, the effectiveness of local pressure groups, the structure of local consultative and policy-making processes may all influence the outcome of a particular initiative. A Marxist analysis may therefore serve to highlight the contradictions which have to be managed by policy-makers but sheds far less light upon the process of decision-making and the influences which are brought to bear upon those decisions. It may help to place a local case study in context but it does not seek to explain how or why a particular policy outcome emerges, why for example education spending should be cut rather than contingency reserves expended or rates further increased. The Marxist approach would thus seem to have limited value in an analysis of the course of the dispute but it may well be argued that the dispute itself served to illustrate the theory that the contradictions which are inevitable within a capitalist society take the form of a conflict between various interests and that is this conflict which the system must manage.

As has previously been stated the case study approach towards analysis of the policy-making process lends itself readily to the pluralist theory. By the very nature of a case study little attempt is made to interpret developments by reference to a systematic framework, rather it

tends towards a description of the process of decision-making through a study of the actions of those who seek to influence that process. This chimes with the essentially descriptive nature of the pluralist theory which purports to focus upon the realities of decision-making in so far as it seeks to identify those who seek to influence policy and then to describe their actions and impact upon the decision-makers.

The role of pressure groups and the need for politicians to retain political support are fundamental to a pluralist analysis which views the apparatus of the state as essentially neutral but providing a framework for competing interests to seek to obtain their preferred policy outcomes. Thus, in the Oxfordshire dispute the political system itself enabled various groups to seek to persuade the local authority to take their preferred course of action; central government sought to influence the County Council in the direction of reduced expenditure, the teacher unions and parents' groups in the direction of maintaining the level of education spending. For the ruling group on the Council the judgement to be made was whether the pressure to maintain spending levels outweighed the need to retain electoral support by keeping domestic rate increases as low as possible. Pluralist analysis therefore concentrates upon the process of policy-making, identifying specific points within the process when pressure is brought to bear upon policy-makers and seeking to quantify the effectiveness of that pressure.

The pluralist approach is closely identified with the political institutions of the western democratic state and it is therefore hardly surprising that the active participants in the system should largely

share a pluralist view of their actions. The belief that policy outcomes are not predetermined, that no one pressure group or interest will remain dominant in such a way as to distort the process, and that policy-makers can and will be influenced by the views and pressure of those with an interest in the policy all serve to reinforce the consultative processes which are fundamental to such a system.

From the pluralist perspective the Oxfordshire dispute would be viewed as an example of a failure on the part of the system to resolve a policy issue withiut resort to open conflict. Key questions would be why were informal channels for pressure group activity unsuccessful in resolving the dispute at an earlier stage, what were the sources of pressure upon the policy-makers and how were policy decisions modified as a result of such pressure? These questions and pluralism's concern for the practical details of the policy-making process are a reflection of the perceptions of those involved in the dispute. No-one questioned the role of the National Union of Teachers in seeking to influence the policy of the local authority, although when their actions were perceived as an attempt to extend that influence so far as to determine the Council's budget their role was brought into question.

It is striking not only that throughout the course of the dispute the N.U.T. believed it could succeed in modifying the Authority's policy, but also that the officers and members of the Council also continued to look for a solution to the problem which might prove to be an acceptable compromise for both parties. The Regional Official for the National Union of Teachers expounded his view that democracy meant more than

simply electing councillors to make policy, it also involved the active participation of pressure groups in that process; the Deputy Chief Education Officer maintained that the dispute would have been resolved at an early stage had a satisfactory collective disputes procedure been in place. Both accepted the pluralist view of the policy-making process - for them it described and justified their everyday actions and resulted in a solution to the dispute which to an extent accommodated the principal requirements of each party.

A model of the policy-making process which might also have been attractive to the parties involved in the Oxfordshire dispute is that provided by Archer who views relationships within the education service as being characterised by the need for thr respective parties to exchange resources in order to facilitate change. The three resources which dominate these exchanges are wealth, power and expertise, the first two within the state system being generally associated with central and (to a lesser degree) local government whilst the latter is possessed by the teaching profession. Teachers require an appropriate level of financial resources in order to achieve their objectives and they exchange their expertise in return for the financial resources which they require. In turn, local education authorities have a legal obligation to provide an education service but in order to do so must surrender financial resources so as to obtain the expertise which they require in order to meet their legal obligations.

From this point of view the Oxfordshire dispute can be seen as an exercise in determining the exchange values of the resources at the

disposal of either party. The local authority had financial resources, some of which were to be spent on providing an education service. However, the Council was constrained by national agreements in respect of elements of its education expenditure, national pay scales for example, but not in matters such as the number of teachers to be employed and consequently pupil/teacher ratios or class sizes. The teachers, aware of the legal and political necessity for the local authority to provide an education service sought the most favourable allocation of financial resources in exchange for their expertise. Although an alternative supply of teachers was theoretically available to Oxfordshire Education Authority, in practical terms (particularly within the framework of nationally determined pay and conditions of service) they were required to reach an accommodation with the existing teaching force.

There is substantial evidence to suggest that the value of the teachers' expertise was increasingly being called into question by Oxfordshire politicians at the time of the dispute and that this manifested itself in calls for a reduction in expenditure on education. A return to former class sizes and pupil/teacher ratios was seen as no bad thing by those who claimed that all the additional financial resources which had been ploughed into education during the previous three decades had failed to produce the results in terms of economic performance or social cohesion which had been sought. In such a climate a move to reduce the cost of education in order to divert more resources elsewhere (principally into ratepayers' pockets) was seen to be an attractive option for the Council.

The response of the teachers was an attempt to increase the demand for their expertise and services in order that the exchange rate might be improved in their favour. Industrial action took the form of refusing to cover the classes of absent colleagues, refusal to teach 'oversized' classes and withdrawal from lunchtime supervision; all sanctions aimed at drawing attention to the value of teacher co-operation and goodwill in ensuring effective delivery of the education service. Strike action also aimed to highlight the value of teachers to the community and a withdrawal of labour had the effect of temporarily reducing the supply of education and hopefully increasing the demand. The need to increase demand was not lost upon the teachers who set about campaigning amongst parents and the general public with a view to increasing awareness of the value of education and consequently putting pressure upon local politicians not to reduce the level of education spending.

There is no evidence that during the course of the dispute either party articulated their mutual dependency on the other's resources nor that the respective values of these resources were fluctuating before and during the period in question, but the resource dependency theory does appear to provide a credible explanation for actions which may have seemed to those involved to have been motivated on the one hand by financial expediency and on the other by the need to pressure policy makers into a policy change.

There can be no doubt that neo-liberal thinking on the part of certain influential Conservative councillors contributed towards the dispute. The origins of neo-liberalism would seem to lie in a critique of the

welfare state and consensus which characterised the three decades following the 1944 Education Act. The view that public services in general and education in particular had become dominated by employees such that they had come to serve the interests and reflect the philosophy of those groups led to a ruthlessly critical view of these services. Salvation lay in the fresh air of the market place with competition acting as the spur to greater efficiency.

In Oxfordshire in 1976 the bracing effects of competition and the free market had yet to be introduced into the education service on a large scale but the possibility remained to seek better value for money and to exercise closer control over education, thus challenging the apparently dominant role of the teachers in determining priorities for the service. Councillors who shared this view demonstrated less reluctance to cut education spending and were most certainly not disposed to view favourably any attempt by teacher unions to interfere with elected members' rights to determine the Council's budgetary priorities!

In the mid 1970s those who were wont to adopt a neo-liberal view lacked the powers to introduce market forces beyond the provisions of the Assisted Places Scheme which enabled local authorities to send a certain number of pupils to private schools; significantly throughout the dispute the resources devoted by Oxfordshire to the Assisted Places Scheme were not reduced. Without the powers given to local education authorities in the 1980s and early '90s neo-liberalism represented more an attitude of mind than a programme of action or a framework for policy-making. Nevertheless it was an attitude which contributed

significantly to a lengthy and bitter dispute and perhaps served to presage future developments in the field of education policy.

The timing of the Oxfordshire dispute, only three years after the reorganisation of the local government system in England and Wales, almost simultaneous with the so-called 'Great Debate' on education, at the height of the Labour Government's economic difficulties, and at a time when neo-liberal (or New Right) ideas were rapidly gaining credence in Conservative Party thinking, gives it particular significance.

The study has highlighted the impact upon relationships within the education service of the developments which accompanied the reorganisation of local government in 1973-74. The increased politicisation of local government with an enhanced role for political parties and the consequent imposition of party discipline upon councillors; the increased emphasis given to the role of the Leader of the Council; the introduction of corporate management techniques with the appointment of Chief Executives and the creation of Policy and Resources Committees, and the changing role of the Chief Education Officer all served to undermine the confidence of the teacher unions in their ability to influence policy-making to the extent which had previously been possible.

Tim Brighouse, appointed Chief Education Officer for Oxfordshire in 1978, describes the pre-1974 situation in local education authority policy-making as one in which *"The charismatic officer 'willed' and the squirearchy agreed."*[1] Following reorganisation he describes a very

different picture: *"Another feature of the post-1974 Local Government in counties and districts was the emergence of the position of 'leader' - a Teutonic sounding inheritance - of party groups. They began to rule their group with Teutonic efficiency and inspired a deference among their followers that matched the grip of the old style CEOs on their office. Education officers themselves realised that 'policy' was political and that majority groups had strong views on any matter from a party political point of view. Almost any apparently innocent improvement or contraction in the service was liable to be regarded as sensitive politically."*[2]

It is clear that Brighouse shares the distaste of many teachers for the increasingly political approach towards policy-making in education. Indeed the distaste stems from the same source - the erosion of the power of teacher union representatives and education officers to combine in order to develop the education system along the lines determined by the 'professionals. With increased party political activity, and in particular the conflicting pressures placed upon Chief Education Officers, the relatively closed world of the teachers and administrators saw its relationships come under considerable strain. Teachers could no longer look to the CEO to deliver on their desired policies, or even to defend the service from expenditure cuts, and so campaigns to protect or improve the service must, of necessity, become increasingly public and political in themselves.

The dispute also marks a significant change in attitudes towards education spending. Teachers had experienced the impact of government

economic constraints upon the education service since the early 1960s but these had primarily manifested themselves in restrictions placed upon the teachers' salary negotiations. During the early 1970s local education authorities had been forced to face a cut in the level of expenditure upon the service but had been able to direct these cuts into 'fringe' activities whilst leaving key areas such as the pupil/teacher ratio untouched. The Oxfordshire dispute followed the first attempt by a local education authority to reduce substantially its teaching force with a consequent worsening of the pupil/teacher ratio. The severity of the spending cuts being imposed upon the education service reflected not only the severity of the nation's economic difficulties but also a growing rejection of the belief that the route to national economic prosperity lay through ever greater investment in the education service.

To be sure, all aspects of public expenditure were subjected to the same pressures as those faced by the education service, but cuts in education spending forced teachers to question their hitherto implicit faith in a shared consensus that investment in education represented investment in the nation's future and was therefore to be protected in times of economic difficulty. This belief that the national consensus in favour of increased spending on education was under attack helps to account for the significance which the National Union of Teachers attached to the Oxfordshire dispute. Repeatedly the Union's leaders spoke of the need to stand firm in Oxfordshire lest other local education authorities should follow the example set by this recalcitrant authority.

Teachers' views of the threat posed to the education service were not based solely upon the imposition of spending cuts which might have been viewed simply as a sharing of the burden of the nation's economic difficulties. At the same time that economic pressures were impacting upon the education service, teachers were also coming under social and political pressures. The development of 'progressive' teaching methods within the primary sector began to draw a hostile response from many parents and pressure to 'return to basics' was further increased by the publicity given to schools such as William Tyndale where such teaching methods were alleged to have been taken to extremes. At the same time the widespread move towards comprehensive secondary education, combined with the raising of the school leaving age to 16 years, had caused dislocation and parental concern. Again, widespread publicity was given to the problems experienced in particular schools and this served to undermine public confidence in the education service.

In the political sphere education became part of the agenda at national level. The fight back against progressive and comprehensive education was sustained by a series of 'Black Papers' detailing the alleged shortcomings of the state education system. Many of these criticisms chimed with parental doubts concerning the validity of many educational developments. Even those politicians who were relatively sympathetic to many of these trends in educational thinking and practice found themselves forced to confront fundamental questions concerning the alleged failure of the education service, despite significant levels of investment, to produce the desired result of national economic prosperity. The need to redress the balance between the economic and

social goals of education formed a significant part of the 'Great Debate' on education which was launched by the Prime Minister in 1976.

Teachers viewed the 'Great Debate' in much the same light as the 'Black Papers', simply as pandering to ill-informed public prejudice. They saw themselves as the victims of a political struggle aimed at securing electoral support rather than addressing the real issues which confronted the education service. Teachers found their judgements increasingly called into question and felt their professional status to be under attack. Set against this background any proposals to reduce substantially the level of funding for the education service came to be viewed as a threat to the whole ethos of the service.

As teachers came to perceive a marked reduction in the weight attached to their professional judgements so the period in question also marked a challenge to the role of education officers and, in particular, chief education officers. The introduction of corporate management techniques into local government, with the creation of Chief Executive positions and Policy and Resources Committees, along with the increased politicisation of local government in general and education in particular, significantly reduced the influence of education officers. As members of education committees came increasingly to see their role as ensuring that party policy was implemented, and as the policy and resources committee sought to ensure that education policy remained strictly within the framework of the Council's overall policy objectives, so the CEO came increasingly to be subservient to political pressures. Furthermore, as many politicians apparently shared a belief

that education officers had traditionally conspired with teachers to further their respective ends, councillors were often far from reluctant to ensure that subservience in future.

From the accounts of the Oxfordshire dispute given by those teachers' leaders most closely involved in the events it is apparent that the issue was perceived as a potential watershed in relations between teachers and their employers. Teacher unions viewed the dispute in a national context, believing that the successful imposition by Oxfordshire of expenditure cuts of the order proposed could lead to a collapse of the consensus on education spending and an erosion of the influence of teachers on crucial questions of educational and public expenditure priorities. Local councillors viewed the dispute in terms of establishing the primacy of political judgements concerning the policy of the County Council over the sectional interests of the Council's employees. Specifically, the privileged position of teachers within the policy-making process which was embodied in the requirement for teacher representatives to be included as voting members of the Education Committee. Councillors viewed the teachers' actions as a challenge to the powers of the people of Oxfordshire to determine their political and expenditure priorities - a challenge which they were determined should not succeed.

The Department of Education and Science, the third 'partner' in the educational consensus (if such it was), would appear to have adopted a studiously non-interventionist role in the dispute. The teachers looked to the Department for a firm intervention with a view to ensuring that

Oxfordshire would be brought back into line with what they believed to be the prevailing consensus. The Secretary of State, however, refused to interfere with the rights of the local education authority to exercise its autonomy in matters such as this. Teachers saw this as at best an excuse for prevarication, and at worst as a convenient excuse for permitting a hard-line education authority to carry out the level of expenditure reductions which the Government really wanted to see - pour encourager les autres! Similarly the Association of ounty Councils adopted a non-interventionist role in which they sought only to assist by bringing the parties together under an independent conciliator. It is interesting to speculate on whether the by then defunct Association of Education Committees might have taken a different view. However the ACC represented County Councils in general and, to the extent that the dispute concerned a council's concern to impose its policy upon one reluctant group of employees (who, in any event, enjoyed a privileged position), then it was unlikely that the Association would overtly undermine Oxfordshire's position.

From all the accounts given by participants in the Oxfordshire dispute there emerges a clear recognition that a period of transition was being experienced. This extended beyond the education service, manifesting itself in legislative changes concerning trade unions and employment rights, fundamental changes within local government and the recognition of the severity of the economic crisis facing the nation with its consequent impact upon perceptions of the role of public expenditure. There was an awareness on the part of those involved in the dispute that

the established relationships were breaking down, and the transition to new working relationships was to prove painful.

From the statements of the leaders of the teachers' side in the dispute it is apparent that they were wedded to a pluralist view of education policy-making and that they regarded the maintenance of a firm consensus within the service as being of fundamental importance. They regarded the Authority's actions as a direct challenge to that consensus and the Council's refusal to accept the unions' views as a rejection of the pluralist approach. Thus, when the teachers failed to influence the Authority's policy-making process through their traditional channels, both formal and informal, they sought to enlist the Department of Education and Science in a process which would re-establish the consensus by bringing Oxfordshire back within the fold. They viewed such pressure as they sought to exert upon Oxfordshire, including industrial action, as being a means towards re-establishing that consensus with its shared concern for safeguarding and advancing the interests of the education service. Traditional channels of influence had been tried or thwarted - the teachers' resentment at the belated consideration by the Education Committee of the proposed cuts should not be underestimated - but the object of the teachers' actions remained largely to re-establish the primacy of those channels and of pressure group influence.

The approach adopted by the local authority could not have been more different. Largely based upon a neo-liberal critique of the local government process it essentially rejected the role of consensus in the policy-making process. Far from recognising the value of the

contribution of teachers in policy-making it viewed their privileged position as antipathetic to the democratic process and as a contributory factor to increased (not to say excessive) local government expenditure and the alienation of ratepayers and parents from the education service. Councillors were determined to ensure that the democratically expressed will of the local population, as expressed in the election of their county councillors, should prevail over the bureaucratic protectionism of the Council's employees. This view manifested itself not only in councillors' attitudes towards the teaching force but also in their view of education officers who were seen as parties to the process of thwarting the democratic process in the name of professional judgement. Although ostensibly a Conservative doctrine this view of the policy-making process, seeking as it did to redress the faults of the previous thirty years of local authority decision-making, presented a radical challenge to existing practices and could not therefore be expected to be implemented without a degree of dislocation.

The Department of Education and Science found itself in a position where the political imperatives of the Government required them to seek from local education authorities a reduction in the level of education spending, in real terms at least. Oxfordshire had seized upon the opportunity to introduce cuts to the fabric of the education service which went beyond what the Department would presumably have regarded as reasonable. However, the extent to which the DES should seek to intervene was clearly a matter for deliberation. The Department chose not to intervene, using the (pluralist) justification that local education authorities enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy, not

least in determining the precise level of their expenditure upon the service. It would appear that the Government's requirement for a significant reduction in the level of local government spending weighed more heavily than the traditional educational alliance in favour of increased, or at least protecting, educational expenditure. To that extent it might be said that the DES recognised that the policy-making process was subject to bounded pluralism and that the Government's economic imperatives represented a level of policy which could not be challenged and within the context of which all policy decisions must be taken.

A Marxist view of the Oxfordshire dispute would point to the events as removing the cloak of consensus from the policy-making process. From this perspective the dispute represents a process by which teachers were forced to confront the reality of the power relationships within the education system. Consensus is seen as a tool for managing the teachers, but a tool whose effectiveness is limited when economic forces reduce the ability of policy-makers to continue to 'buy' consent by modifying policies to reflect teacher opinion. The dispute therefore reflects the growing awareness of the teachers that they have no privileged position and that they must struggle for their share of the nation's (and the local authority's) resources along with other groups.

Certainly at the time of the Oxfordshire dispute teachers felt that they were under attack from many quarters, over educational standards, methodology, the alleged mis-match between the end product of the state education system and the needs of the economy, and over the level of

funding for the education service. The dispute itself served to highlight the limitations of the traditional, consensus-based approach towards policy-making to resolve problems in the new climate. Traditional channels of influence proved inadequate when faced with a rejection by one party of the philosophy of consensus.

The events of the dispute reveal a growing awareness of the boundaries of the pluralist approach; a growing recognition that first order policy issues, such as the need to reduce the overall level of public expenditure, place severe constraints upon local policy-makers. The extent to which the eventual outcome represented a compromise solution reflects the extent to which these limitations were recognised.

Having seen the necessity to redefine the consensus the National Union of Teachers continued with its policy of local resistance to cuts in education spending but began to develop a national campaign to 'Save Education'. The theme 'our Children, Our Future' demonstrated a recognition of the fundamental challenge to which teachers believed they were required to respond. The campaign sought to fight for educational resources in the political arena, involving teachers directly in the electoral process in an attempt to place education high upon the political agenda and to secure appropriate commitments from politicians. No longer in a privileged position, teachers would henceforth be required to seek commitments at the highest level if consensus was to operate effectively within the education service.

This study commenced with the intention of analysing the events of the Oxfordshire dispute in detail with a view to identifying the points in the policy-making process when pressure was productively applied by the National Union of Teachers in order to achieve a policy modification. In this way it would be possible to draw conclusions regarding the effectiveness of pressure group activity. During the course of the study the focus shifted towards consideration of the applicability of theoretical models of the policy-making process to the events of the dispute and to national developments at the time which provide the context for what was a significant industrial dispute.

The various theoretical approaches have served to highlight important aspects of policy-making during the dispute. Systems theory, with its emphasis upon the importance of generating and maintaining support, the role of pressure groups as 'gatekeepers' to the political process and the importance of feedback, illuminated the means by which the political system sought to match a disturbance to the system with an appropriate response. It also points to the shortcomings of the National Union of Teachers in acting as a demand regulator and leads one to speculate as to whether the dispute might not have been resolved at an earlier stage had the Union been able to reduce its demands in such a way that its actions were no longer perceived as a threat to the Council's right to determine its own budget.

Marxist theory served to emphasise the role of the political system in seeking to manage tensions and contradictions which are inherent in the system. This led to a better appreciation of the development of separate

value systems within relatively autonomous sub-systems such as the education service and the way in which such values can and do conflict with other economic and political priorities. The neo-liberal perspective shed light upon the reasons for the change of attitude towards the education service and the breakdown of consensus; it served to illuminate the context in which the Oxfordshire dispute took place.

Thus the three perspectives outlined above all helped to highlight important aspects of the dispute but they are all, of course, intended to do more than this in so far as they are intended to provide a model for the policy-making process itself. It is conceivable that these theories do serve to explain the underlying forces which determine the actions of those involved in education policy-making but on the basis of one case study it is not possible to reach a judgement as to whether one or more of the theories has more general applicability.

Pluralism on the other hand at least accords with the perceptions of those involved in the dispute, and since this theory really seeks to describe a political process and value system which is widely accepted by politicians and pressure group activists, it provides an attractive theory for them which is seen to correspond closely with the practical reality of the policy-making process. There is no evidence from this study that those involved believed other than that legitimate pressure group activity was an integral part of the process; rather the argument centred on the relative weight to be placed upon the views of pressure groups and those expressed by the electorate in returning county councillors. The dispute therefore involved an attempt to define the

boundaries of pluralism in the context of local education authority policy-making. The forces which combined to bring matters to a head in Oxfordshire may have led to a re-evaluation of those boundaries but pluralism, albeit bounded rather than unrestricted, would still appear to offer the most satisfactory explanation of the actions of those concerned with formulating and influencing education policy.

I have argued that the Oxfordshire dispute represents a watershed in relations between teachers, their employers and the Government. It marks a unique moment in the development of education policy-making when a combination of several recent developments placed the education 'partnership' under extreme pressure. The reform of the system of local government, the introduction of corporate management techniques into the management of local authorities, the crisis in the national economy, the changing nature of teacher unions, an increasingly critical view of the education system (as manifested in the 'Great Debate') and the emergence of neo-liberal thought into the political mainstream all combined to create in Oxfordshire a dispute which foreshadowed many of the educational developments of the following decade and a half.

The dispute marks the transition from consensus in which education reflected a partnership between teachers, local education authorities and the Department of Education and Science (I would argue <u>not</u> local authorities and central government per se) to a newly evolving relationship. The new order saw central government increasingly less reluctant to contemplate cuts in education spending, local authorities increasingly exercising financial and political control over the

education service, and teacher unions engaged largely in a process of damage limitation. Perhaps in the light of these developments the remarkable aspect of the Oxfordshire dispute is that sufficient consensus remained for a compromise solution to be found after all!

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